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Methodist Missionary Society History Project  
November 25-26, 2003 Sarum College, Salisbury. United Kingdom

## Ghanaian Appropriation of Wesleyan Theology in Mission 1961-2000

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### Abstract:

The historiography on African Christianity has tended to emphasize two facets: the role of western missionaries and the continuing growth of African Independent Churches. In more recent times, the explosive revival of Pentecostalism has attracted attention. What is lacking is an in-depth study of mainline, missions-founded churches, which have integrated the strengths of western missions, African Independency and Pentecostalism. This study uses the post-missionary era of the Methodist Church, Ghana, 1961-2000, to examine how Ghanaian Methodists have appropriated Wesleyan theology in their mission endeavors. Special attention is given to liturgical renewal, especially the use of *ebibindwom* (sacred lyrics) and the dynamics of ethnicity in missions in Ghana during this period.

The Methodist Church, Ghana, began as an indigenous initiative in 1831 with a Fante Bible Class in Cape Coast before Wesleyan missionaries joined them in 1835. Tracing its growth through the ministries of Thomas Birch Freeman, the *Nananom Mpow* incident, the effect of the William Wade Harris and the Sampson Oppong revivals, this study asserts that the Methodist Church, Ghana had a decisive indigenous beginning.

Is the Methodist Church, Ghana, therefore an indigenous church? Would it have been so if the MMS missionaries had not been part of it? What is the role of Ghanaian Methodism in the political evolution of Ghana? What do Ghanaians think of present-day Methodism?

These and other questions would be addressed in this paper and thus offer a more comprehensive understanding of African Christianity.

“Methodism was born in song” so begins the preface of the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1933)<sup>1</sup> which is ironically still used in many parts of World Methodism but sadly marginalized in the United Kingdom and the United States. The statement though is as universally relevant and is it true. For the Methodists, music was and has been the main channel of evangelism, discipleship and maturation in the Christian faith. In parts of the world where formal western education was introduced rather late, the memorization of songs which are full of biblical narratives and images have served to expand the knowledge of indigenous Methodists. In current African Christianity, and particularly in its Ghanaian mode, the use of music is not only a tool for worship but a sign of denominational loyalty.

## INTRODUCTION

Ghanaian Methodism is the product of indigenous efforts from 1831 through 1961, at which point autonomy was obtained from the Methodists of Great Britain. The history of this church over the last century has coincided with a period of extraordinary expansion of the Christian population in Africa. This growth is especially significant viewed against the backdrop of the political and economic fortunes of the continent. Africa began the twentieth century as partitioned colonies of European countries and ended as a continent of independent political entities. Economically, the continent continues to lag behind in the provision of social amenities to her citizens. And yet the religious landscape could not be more active. The ubiquity of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa prompted the late Africanist Adrian Hastings to remark, “Black Africa today is inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity, a presence which a couple of generations ago could still be not unreasonably dismissed as fundamentally marginal and a mere subsidiary aspect of colonialism” (Hastings 1990, 208).

Many nationalists anticipated that political independence in sub-Saharan Africa would diminish if not altogether eliminate mission-established Christianity. Theologians devoted much attention to the “foreignness” of the Christianity imparted by Westerners.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it was charged, “Missionary exploits prove that the Christian claim to have a monopoly on the truth inevitably leads to the oppression of other people and their culture” (Sampson 2001, 92). Because missionaries were perceived as benefiting from the political and economic presence of European powers, they were inevitably linked with the colonialists and thus were considered guilty by association. Too often it appeared that to become a Christian meant taking on Western cultural ways. Local cultures were denigrated, and it was presumed that they had to be transformed, if not destroyed, before a foundation for the acceptance of Christianity could be built.

What was often missed in such assessments was that, in spite of the failures in the transmission of the gospel in Africa, the message was transmitted and received and appropriated by Africans.<sup>3</sup> Kwame Bediako cites the Nigerian church historian E. A.

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<sup>1</sup> Methodist Publishing House, London.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Bond, writing of mission churches, asserts, “These preserve essentially the same form and content in Africa that they have in Europe” (1979).

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the missionized ultimately were able to separate Christianity from the culture of the missionaries, embracing Christ without denying their own culture, shows an element of local agency that is usually missing in this debate.

Ayandele, who, at the end of a missionary-bashing conference, remarked, “Even if you came to us within the framework of colonialism, and did not preach the Gospel in all its purity, that has not prevented us from receiving the Gospel and genuinely living it” (Bediako 1995, 123).

One could hardly find a more apt exemplar of the contextualization of the Christian faith by Africans than the subject of this paper, the Methodist Church, Ghana (MCG).<sup>4</sup> John Baur, in *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa*, asserts, “In modern Christian Africa the place of honour among the first local churches undoubtedly belongs to Ghana, more precisely to the Methodist Church among the Fante” (Baur 1994, 117). Baur’s statement reflects the perspective that I am positing, namely, that the MCG has been a remarkable African institution since its initiation. Bengt Sundkler likewise credits the Wesleyan Fante on the Gold Coast<sup>5</sup> for establishing a people’s movement and a pace-setting church (Sundkler and Steed 2000, 85).

After gaining autonomy from the British Methodist Conference in 1961, intensified efforts were expended in contextualizing Ghanaian Methodism. This thesis focuses on two broad areas: 1) how the post-independence Ghanaian cultural and social milieu has shaped the self-understanding of the MCG, and 2) what the church has retained of its Wesleyan Methodist heritage.<sup>6</sup> Cardinal elements in this analysis of MCG identity include Africanness, Akan tradition and identity, and Methodist missionary theology. The thrust of this paper is to show that Ghanaians accepted Methodism on their own terms and reworked it to fit their needs.

Unlike much recent research on African Christian history, this study focuses on mainline Christianity and thereby helps fill a void created by the fact that so many contemporary Ghanaian scholars have concentrated their research on African Initiated Churches (AICs).<sup>7</sup> As a result of such concentration, some people today conceive of African Christianity solely in terms of the indigenous churches, founded independently

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<sup>4</sup> The Methodist Church, Ghana is a British Methodist-instituted denomination in Ghana. It is distinguished from the Ghana branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, both of which are still under the jurisdiction of their American churches. The Evangelical Methodist Church, an offshoot of the Methodist Church, Ghana is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>5</sup> The British established the Gold Coast Colony after the defeat of the Asante in the Anglo-Asante War of 1873–1874. (This conflict was known locally as “Sagrenti War,” after the commander of the English forces, Sir Garnet Wolseley). The colony covered the broad expanse between the Asante kingdom and the Atlantic Ocean. For administrative purposes it was divided into two spheres: the Colony and the Protectorate, the colony being the coastal enclave which had had contact with Europeans since the fifteenth century, and the Protectorate being the interior region between the coastal belt and Asante (Boahen in Ajayi and Crowder 1973, 167–205).

<sup>6</sup> The analysis involves chronicling historical development and highlighting elements of contextualization. Relevant information is derived from conference agenda, minutes, and special reports, as well as from interviews with informants who corroborated historical events. Profiles of leaders have been culled from special events programs such as induction and memorial services.

<sup>7</sup> AICs are churches founded in Africa by Africans and primarily for Africans. Typically, they do not have any formal connection with churches in the West, even though some of them are now establishing branches in the Western world for African immigrants. AICs are also called African Independent Churches or African Indigenous Churches. In this study I use the term “African Initiated Churches.” For a useful work on the various typologies, see Turner 1967.

from Western influence, usually in the twentieth century. What is needed to balance the picture is in-depth study of older mission-founded churches. Dana L. Robert writes, “African mission initiatives in mainline-initiated churches can provide a framework within which issues of popular spirituality, theology and culture, women’s role, the role of mission education in building African societies, and power struggles in the churches can be raised.”(Robert 2003, 11)<sup>8</sup>

The present account of the MCG contributes to the righting of the balance. This church was initiated by Ghanaians, developed by Ghanaians, and led by Ghanaians for 130 years prior to its gaining autonomy in 1961. Although the story of MCG foundations has been told before, it has failed to highlight the role of the Ghanaian Fante Christians as the prime movers. The present thesis, demonstrating that MCG is a truly indigenous African institution, is offered as a response to Hastings’s statement, “What is most required at present seems to be a [series] of new publications based on archival research, personal experience and field work and focusing, regionally or locally, on mission-founded Christian churches in the periods 1920–1950 and 1970–1990” (Hastings 1990, 209). This work adds to the literature on African agency in initiating and collaborating in Christian mission. In this connection I recall the words of Kwame Bediako: “Theological consciousness presupposes religious tradition, and tradition requires memory and memory is integral to identity: without memory, we have no past, and if we have no past, then we lose our identity” (Bediako 1996, 428). Hence this study attempts to highlight and sharpen the identity of MCG.

### Definitions

Four principal concepts merit definition: Contextualization<sup>9</sup>, Wesleyan theology and holistic mission theory, Africanness, and Akan<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Elaborating this point, Robert argues that scholars have assumed that “historic mission churches were mere clones of their western founders. Studies of mission initiatives within mainline churches focused on how Christians in mission churches left them to start independent movements or else were forced out by colonialists and European traditionalists. The flowering of AIC studies has left historians of historic mission churches in a defensive posture, caught between the need to decolonize mission history on the one hand, and to defend themselves against charges of inauthenticity vis-à-vis AICs on the other” (Robert 2003, 5). In a similar affirmation of mainline churches, Obeng adds, “It is not only the independent churches that have taken the initiative to foster the incarnation of the Christian message” (Obeng 1996, 6).

<sup>9</sup> The concept of contextualization is a relatively contemporary addition to the discussion of the interaction of gospel and culture. Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, directors of the Theological Education Fund, coined the term in early 1972. According to Bruce J. Nicholls, “The TEF report for that year, ‘Ministry and Context,’ suggested that contextualization implies all that is involved in the familiar term indigenization, but seeks to press beyond it to take into account the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice which characterized the historical movement of nations in the Third World” (Nicholls 1979, 21). More recently contextualization has been described as “the interpenetration of faith and culture” (Bowie 1999, 69). Dean Gilliland states, “Contextualization means that the Word must dwell among all families of humankind today as truly as Jesus lived among his own kin. The gospel is Good News when it provides answers for a particular people living in a particular place at a particular time. This means the worldview of that people provides a framework for communication, the questions and needs of that people are a guide to the emphasis of the message, and the cultural gifts of that people become the medium of expression” (Gilliland 2000, 226).

Contextualization of the gospel within culture echoes the incarnational nature of the Word of God. Since God came to earth enfleshed in Jesus Christ, and Jesus took the form of a Jewish man, it is imperative that the Christian message be enfleshed in each and every culture in order to assert its authenticity. Anything short of that results in a mismatch (Shorter 1988).

### Wesleyan Theology and Holistic Mission Theory

MCG efforts to contextualize the gospel have been applied within the boundaries of Methodist theology and mission theory. Methodist mission theology is grounded both in the personal authority of the Risen Christ and in the world's need of salvation (Wainwright 1995, 252). Unlike other significant leaders of Christian revival movements—such as Aquinas or Calvin—the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, did not set about to compose a *summa theologiae*. Instead his theology was set within the context of his life and ministry. “The vehicles for Wesley’s theologizing were not scholastic but practical in nature” (Coppedge 1991, 268). Wesley never saw himself as propagating a new truth but rather “the full, primitive, scriptural, Christian faith, once delivered to the saints” (Strawson 1983, 183). The Catholic spirit of the nineteenth-century followers of Wesley is captured in these words:

Our religion is Christianity or it is nothing; but we do not call ourselves the “Church” or “Christians,” lest we should exclude, even by implication, those who “are not of this fold” from the “flock.” . . . We are “Catholics,” for we pray

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The only way to maintain indigenization while minimizing the possibility of syncretism is to take two principles, the indigenizing and the pilgrim, operating simultaneously. Contextualization takes the indigenizing principle, which states that “the gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is at home with the gospel,” and adds the pilgrim principle, which warns that the gospel “will put us out of step with society—for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.” Thus, as Andrew Walls notes, the gospel is both the prisoner and liberator of cultures simultaneously (Walls 1996, 3–15). The theme of contextualization runs through this study of MCG; it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the mission history of Methodism in Ghana, for assessing past traditions as well as current realities.

<sup>10</sup> The last term needing clarification is Akan. As a noun, *Akan* is both singular and plural. The Akan people form two-thirds of the population of Ghana and therefore constitute the majority of MCG membership. The Akan occupy the greater part of southern Ghana in the semi-deciduous forest areas. (Some Akan are also to be found in the Ivory Coast.) The Ghana-based Akan may be divided into their major cultural and geographic divisions, each typified by the best-known sub-group: the coastal Akan (Mfantsefo or Fante); the eastern Akan (Akuapem); and the inland Akan (Asuantsefo-Ashanti or Asante) (Oppong 1993, 23). Naturally, they share linguistic and cultural similarities. The languages are a subgroup of the Kwa language, which is found in other parts of West Africa.

A significant aspect of Akan cultural life is its matrilineal line of succession; brothers and nephews on the mother’s side, and not sons, traditionally inherit property. Political succession is also matrilineal. However, the matrilineal inheritance system is no longer uniformly practiced. Christianity, Westernization, and modernity have all affected the Akan way of life, and most people in urban areas follow the dictates of a last will and testament in property distribution rather than the traditional cultural dictates. Laws have been enacted that operate should one die intestate; property is now divided equally among wife, children, and the extended family.

The *Mfantsefo*, or Fante people, form the primary subject of this study for two reasons: it is the group among whom European missionary activities began and, because I myself am Fante and a pastor with MCG, it is the group with which I am most familiar.

Initially Methodism came to the Fante on the coast of Ghana, and then, in collaboration with the European missionaries, Fante believers transmitted Ghanaian Methodism to the other ethnic groups. Ghanaian Methodism therefore bears an undeniable Fante flavor.

that grace may be on all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We are “Protestants,” for we deny that there is any authority in Christ’s Church higher than His word. We are “Methodists,” for we desire to be “The friends of all, the enemies of none.” (Strawson 1983, 197)

Wesley, the man who ministered outside the Anglican Church with great reluctance, was unwilling to define himself theologically in exclusivistic terms. His approach to theology was more eclectic, placing different and renewed emphases on various themes instead of proposing new ones. Christian perfection or scriptural holiness was regarded by Wesley as “the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodist; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up” (Strawson 1983, 225).

Wesley’s sole theological guide was the Scriptures; it was his “norming norm.” The other elements of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral—reason, tradition, and experience—served as secondary sources aiding the interpretation of Scripture but never superseding Scripture.

The Reformers leaned heavily on the language categories that describe creation, sovereign majesty, the legal world of the law court, and to some degree the language of redemption from slavery. This meant that in their understanding of God they tended to focus on his roles as creator, king, judge, and redeemer. Wesley uses all these but also adds to them categories of person-to-person relationships, the sanctuary, the pastoral scene, and most often the home. This meant that Wesley understood more clearly the roles of God as teacher/friend, priest, shepherd and father. The effect of Wesley’s adding these biblical analogies to those emphasized by the Reformers was a modifying of the severity of the earlier categories. (Coppedge 1991, 281)

Wesley’s holistic perspective bridged God’s transcendence and immanence. His theological worldview was composed of such themes as God as Father, whose way of relating to humankind was love; hence Wesley’s strong focus on the concept of assurance.

Wesley also emphasized holiness. For Wesley, “Salvation had to include an element of imparted holiness as well as imputed holiness” (Coppedge 1991, 284). Concern for the *practice* of the Christian faith drove his preaching and practical ministry. Finally, Wesley emphasized the concept of grace: “Grace that comes before salvation (prevenient grace), grace that leads to repentance, grace that is the basis of justification by faith, grace that is behind assurance of salvation, grace that makes possible growth in Christian experience, grace that works entire sanctification as well as its assurance, and grace that leads to further growth after sanctification until God graciously glorifies the saint” (Coppedge 1991, 285). Wesleyan theology can therefore be summarized as a holy Father working by grace to produce a holy people.

If Wesley’s theology is difficult to categorize, his mission theology is even more difficult to unpack. Both Cyril Davey’s *March of Methodism: The Story of Methodist Missionary Work Overseas* (Epworth Press, 1951) and N. Allen Birthwhistle’s “Methodist Missions” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (Rupert Davies et al. 1993, 1–116) record the missionary activity of the Wesleyan movement but devote no attention at all to Methodist missiological theology. Several reasons account

for this lack. For one, Wesley never applied the term “missionary” to himself or his movement. Wesley saw as primary concern to be the immediate needs of his day, hence his oft-cited aphorism, “I look upon all the world as my parish.” He referred to the world outside the ecclesiastical control of the established church and not to the world in the geographic sense. This is not to say that Wesley had no missionary sensitivities. His background and experience—the missionary influence of his mother and his term of pastoral work in Georgia—grounded him for his future ministry. The missionary endeavors of early Methodist preachers, and especially of the church as a collective institution, owed more to Wesley’s young Welsh assistant, Thomas Coke—that “fireball of dedicated energy”—than to John Wesley (Vickers 1996, 135). But again this does not mean that one cannot glean the distinctives of Wesleyan mission theology from Wesley’s life and ministry.

There is a natural linkage of holy living and social reform. Methodist missions have had a holistic outlook of incorporating proclamation, presence, social improvement, justice, and human development. Methodism has offered a biblically based, theologically comprehensive, and compassionate approach to ministry focused on the whole person.

The most frequently used term to describe the Methodist mission impulse is “holiness theology” (Robert 2000; Lang’at 2002). Wesley understood Christian religion as being distinguishable by its social outcome: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ that he who loves God loves his brother also; and that we manifest our love by doing good unto all men [sic], especially to them that are of the household of faith.” (Wright 1984, 9)

### Africanness

The need for “Africanness” became a clarion call in Africa at the time of political independence, influencing many of the policies of governments and state institutions. This movement took many forms including the appointment of Africans to replace all positions held by Europeans at the time of decolonization. There is a plethora of literature on the subject of Africanness especially in its political and philosophical aspects (Baur 1994, 447ff.).<sup>11</sup> This study argues in concert with Lamin Sanneh (1989) that translation empowers vernacularization, and with Andrew Walls (1996) that conversion need not be

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<sup>11</sup> For this study, John Pobee’s enumeration of the six elements of *Africanness* will provide the background in determining what is distinctively African. First, according to Pobee, Africans are human beings still seeking to attain the full potential of their humanness. Second, Africans are unable to explain life without reference to what is religious and spiritual, and therefore they cannot be satisfied with a purely materialistic and secular worldview. Third, African identity is rooted in a sense of belonging to a community that embraces the living, the dead, and the as yet unborn. Fourth, Africans perceive reality in holistic terms, shunning any dualism between material/spiritual, individual/community, religious/social, and intellectual/emotional. Fifth, the institution of chieftaincy in Western Africa is the focal point for culture and a model for leadership patterns. Therefore, any attempt at denigrating culture and converting Africans away from their communities and from their chiefs into Christian enclaves is seen as an assault on Africans and Africanness. Sixth, African culture is expressed through several media, including arts, crafts, and liturgical rites, and not only in concepts and ideas (Pobee 1996, 22–27). These six elements serve as a guideline as this thesis explores the question of Africanness in the history and development of the MCG from 1961 to 2000.

culturally discontinuous, and lastly with Robert Schreiter (1985) that in constructing their own local theology, Ghanaian Methodist Christians have demonstrated a lively and concrete response to the gospel. My research has highlighted the faithfulness of the MCG community to the ideal of Africanness. I contend that, far from being an irrelevant foreign religious institution, the MCG is an authentic African church.

## FOUNDATIONS OF GHANA METHODISM

The MCG, unlike many churches in Africa that were initiated by Western missionary societies, was indigenous from its infancy. Five foundational elements that shaped its indigenous character and ethos will be explored: 1) The formation and role of the Fante Bible band; 2) the ministry of Thomas Freeman; 3) the *Nananom Mpow*<sup>12</sup> episode; 4) the ministry of the prophet William Wadé Harris; and 5) the contribution of evangelist Samson Oppong. It was the initiative of the Fante Bible study group that led to the involvement of English Wesleyan missionaries. Thomas Freeman, a lay preacher of mixed race from England, who labored in Ghana and neighboring states for half a century, excelled at empowering indigenous leadership. The *Nananom Mpow* incident spotlighted the role of courageous lay people in breaking the hold of a traditional cult, and the ministries of Harris and Oppong,<sup>13</sup> Spirit-filled, though semiliterate, West African prophets, succeeded in areas where Western missionaries had found it impossible to make progress. To understand the dynamics of these events is to appreciate the fact that Ghanaian Methodism has had an all-embracing indigenous character right from its beginning.

### Ghanaian Christianity: Early Foundations, 1471–1831

Methodism came relatively late to Ghana, in the early 1830s. Portuguese explorers and Catholic missionary orders preceded Protestant missionaries by at least two centuries, and Moravian and Anglican missionaries arrived in the eighteenth century, a hundred years before the arrival of the first Methodist missionary. A review of the record of earlier European and Christian influences in Ghana will be helpful before examining the roots and development of Methodism in Ghana.

Portuguese explorers first brought Christianity to Ghana<sup>14</sup> in the latter part of the fifteenth century, thereby establishing outposts in Shama in 1471 and Elmina in 1482. On January 19, 1482, Diego da Azambuja, a Portuguese Catholic sailor, met with the Fante king, Kwamina Ansa (Caramansa), in Elmina and received permission to build a castle.

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<sup>12</sup> The literal meaning of *Nananom Mpow* is “ancestral grove.” Some scholars, including Thomas McCaskie, use the form *Nanaam Mpow*, a colloquial spelling. I will use *Nananom Mpow* unless citing sources that use the colloquial form.

<sup>13</sup> In the text I am using Andrew Walls’s spelling of Samson Oppong in the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions (BDCM)*. In citations, where the spelling sometimes varies, I will retain the spelling found in the original sources.

<sup>14</sup> Technically, the country Ghana came into being on March 6, 1957. Its immediate predecessor, the Gold Coast, was a combination of three separate territories under British colonial rule, namely, the Gold Coast Colony, Asante, and the Northern Territories. The British called the three areas as a group “Gold Coast”. For the sake of consistency in this study, I will use “Ghana” and “Ghanaians” retrospectively throughout all the different phases of its history. The Gold Coast, Asante, and the Northern Territories will be used when needed in specific instances. In the past, most authors used “Ashanti” in referring to the Asante kingdom, region or people. In this paper, I will use Asante, the more accurate terminology for all three.



D'Azambuja built a chapel inside the castle, naming it Sao Jorge (St. George), after the patron saint of Portugal. Because the Portuguese restricted themselves to their own folk inside their enclaves, they had little missionary impact on the local populace (Sanneh 1983, 20).

But a century later, in 1572, as a result of the work of Portuguese Augustinian missionaries, the Fante kings of Efutu, Komenda, and Abura, all in modern-day southern Ghana, were converted to the Christian faith. In the eighteenth century Moravian missionaries from Brandenburg, Germany, and Anglican missionaries from England sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, initiated pioneer missionary work in Ghana. Some of their leading Fante converts were trained and ordained in Europe as ministers: Jacobus Capitein and Philip Quaque are two of the better-known figures. Quaque was an Anglican chaplain of the colonial forts for fifty years, and Capitein, also an Anglican, was part of the first Fante Bible translation project. However, as Adrian Hastings notes, "In missionary terms they were all failures . . . gifted individuals, blossoming in Europe but tied in Africa to a tiny white slaving community and only serving beyond it a rather nominally Christian fringe of mulattos living in the shadow of a fort"<sup>15</sup> (Hastings 1994, 178; Kpobi 2001).

By the early decades of the nineteenth century the work of the Protestant and Catholic missions had begun to take hold. And so, when the seeds of Methodism were sown in 1835, they did not fall on virgin soil. Methodism came to Ghana in general and to Cape Coast<sup>16</sup> in particular when there were already professing Ghanaian Christians. In fact, it was Ghanaian Christians who, in effect, invited Methodism to Ghana.

The first full-scale historical treatment of MCG is Arthur E. Southon's *Gold Coast Methodism* (1935). Southon emphasizes the role played by Ghanaians, especially coastal Fante people, in establishing Methodism in Ghana. At the time of the publication of his book, the centenary year of MCG, 1935, it was unusual for histories of mission churches to give a prominent place to the initiative and collaboration of native Christians. So, the fact that Southon repeats on almost every page that this particular church was an indigenous institution initiated and nurtured by indigenous leadership, is a testimony to the labor of the early founders of Ghanaian Methodism. Current scholarship on the genesis of MCG points out the significant role the Fante leaders played. John Baur argues that the story of the original Fante Methodists "is a source of inspiration for Christian evangelism" (1994, 117). "The Fante Wesleyans had created a people's movement," asserts Bengt Sundkler (2002, 207).

Southon's record begins with "the most inhuman traffic in the world," the slave trade (1935, 14). Dotted along the coast of Ghana are castles and forts originally used as

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<sup>15</sup> There is ample evidence to suggest that Europeans on the coast intentionally frustrated the efforts of the Ghanaians who had become Christian ministers. Isaac Tufuoh refers to one such incident when he records that the governor used every conceivable excuse to cancel church services in the castle during Quaque's time. See "Relations between Christian Missions, European Administrations, and Traders in the Gold Coast, 1828–74" (Baeta 1968, 34–58). Tufuoh concludes, "A constant source of frustration for those who had attempted evangelization in these parts before the Wesleyans had been the indifference, sometimes hostility, displayed by the merchants towards an activity which all too often stood as a silent reproach to their manner of life" (Baeta 1968, 55).

<sup>16</sup> "Cape Coast" is an English corruption of the Portuguese *Cabo Corso*, meaning, "short cape." It was a name given in the mid-fifteenth century to the rocky promontory on which two centuries later a trading post was built (Hinderink and Sterkenburg 1975, 29).

trade posts and ultimately as holding houses for captured men and women to be placed on slave ships for passage to Europe and the Americas. The history of Ghana cannot be told without reference to the slave trade.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Isichei rightly states, “The great weakness of the Christian enterprise in black Africa in the Middle Ages was its close association with the slave trade” (1995, 71).<sup>18</sup>

The original motivation for secular European presence in Africa was trade in gold, slaves, and raw materials. The presence of the European merchants and their trade interests provided in effect the balance of power. David Kimble argues,

Economic development was the main mediating force whereby the individualist, competitive, acquisitive attitudes and values of the West were introduced into African society. The impact was least, however, during the centuries of pre-colonial coastal trade, greatest during the comparatively short colonial era. The early European traders brought new means to wealth and power: their guns and gunpowder profoundly altered the balance of power among the coastal States with which they came into contact, and contributed significantly to the rise of the interior kingdoms, notably Akwamu and Ashanti. (Kimble 1963, 128)

The social changes that the presence of European traders on the coast generated affected every strata of society. The local political structure was altered and the cohesiveness of the extended family and clan was subverted as new associations and influences were introduced.

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<sup>17</sup> Though the culpability of Africans in the slave trade is still a hotly debated issue in African and African-American studies in the United States, there is no gainsaying the fact that the slave trade was aided and abetted by the Africans who sold their fellow Africans, usually of a different ethnic group taken captive as a result of warfare and raids. In recent years, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., of Harvard University, has accused Africans of committing a Holocaust-type crime by selling other blacks to whites. See his documentary series *The Wonders of the African World*, and in particular, “Slave Kingdoms, Episode 2, Elmina Slave Fortress.” This documentary series engendered such a robust rebuttal, especially from African intellectuals in the diaspora that Lansine Kaba’s 2000 presidential address to the African Studies Association was devoted to the subject. In the rebuttal, Kaba suggests that perhaps Gates allows the personal circumstances of his family’s ordeal to overwhelm him so that he pays scant attention to the European initiation and participation in the slave trade. Kaba admits that the African elite participated in and benefited from the slave trade, but he rejects any assertion of an equal culpability between white slave traders and black middlemen. He writes, “Unlike the investors, the insurers, the shipbuilders, the dealers, and especially the mariners from abroad, the local African providers had little knowledge of the whole Atlantic system. Moreover at a time when Africa was lagging technologically behind Europe, the slave trade, with its capital intensive nature, could function only with the advanced technology then available in the West.” Additionally, Kaba argues that to equate the trans-Atlantic slave trade with the Holocaust is to infer that the African participants had a program to annihilate neighboring tribesmen, in this case, captives from raids and prisoners of wars, when, in fact, they bartered slaves for guns in order to survive the onslaught of European firearms. This last point of the need by Africans to favorably compete in the militarization of the period is given credence by Basil Davidson (1980, 242): “Huge quantities of firearms were poured into West Africa during the period of the slave trade, and the state of Dahomey, increasingly a militarized autocracy, was among those that had the doubtful benefit. At the height of the eighteenth-century commerce, gunsmiths in Birmingham alone were exporting muskets to Africa at a rate of between 100,000 and 150,000 a year and it was common talk that one Birmingham gun rated one Negro slave. This last was Birmingham sales talk rather than a statement of fact . . . yet the spirit of the saying was true enough.”

<sup>18</sup> Isichei’s statement, though helpful, rather obscures the fact that the slave trade and the arrival of Methodism in Ghana falls outside the traditional definition of Middle Ages being A. D. 500—1500.

Methodism, therefore, arrived in Ghana during conditions created by the slave trade. Methodism was to aid in creating a counter-cultural establishment in this period. In a significant work, Lamin Sanneh develops the concept of “antistructure” to argue that “West African Christianity espoused the culture of radical criticism of all power structures, a demystification of ideologies of absolute authority, and a dissemination of what are often regarded as ‘democratic’ and ‘liberal’ values” (Sanneh 2000, 173; see also 1999, 3–11). Christianity, as seen by Sanneh, then became “more than a nemesis of slavery; it is the nemesis, on the right of hereditary privilege and natural entitlement, and on the left, of ideologies of power and state absolutization” (Sanneh, in Miller 2002, 26). Adrian Hastings adds that in the Ghanaian experience, “the roots of nineteenth century Christianity . . . are to be found less in the return of recaptives [recaptured, liberated slaves] than among pupils of Philip Quaque and the Cape Coast Castle school” (1995, 340). Thus, the peculiar situation of slavery abetted by both imperial trading concerns on one hand, and native traditional authorities on the other, stimulated a reaction that served to produce the uniquely “democratic” Christianity in which MCG played a significant part.

Ghanaian Methodism began in the days when European powers, principally Britain, had determined to end the trade in human slaves. Britain declared the slave trade illegal in its empire as of 1807, and from 1824 slave trading was considered piracy and punishable by death; but it took quite a while to stamp it out. Christian stalwarts like John Wesley, William Wilberforce,<sup>19</sup> and Thomas Buxton, through their public advocacy, aroused the collective conscience of England to the evils of slavery. Many missionaries in that era went to Africa with their conscience thoroughly awakened (Walls, in Anderson 1994, 11–17).<sup>20</sup>

Two questions dominated the political life of Ghana in the early decades of the nineteenth century: who would control the inland country where the gold mining had shifted from the coast, and who would control the routes where commerce with the various European merchants took place? (Davidson 1976, 126). As a result, the coastal plains provided a very unstable environment. The Ghanaian coastal Fante people lived in dread of the military might of their northern neighbors, the Asante, and of becoming victims of the slave traders. The Asante kingdom made ample use of its might to capture and trade slaves from far and near. Fantes determined to settle closer to the coasts—and therefore nearer the forts—to enjoy the protection of the Europeans. The MCG was thus born at a time when the danger of war and slave raids was constant on the coastal plains of Ghana.

### **The Fante Bible Band: The Roots of Ghanaian Methodism**

Perhaps one of the most far-reaching effects of the European presence was the appearance of a new elite characterized and defined more by secular achievement than by heredity. In other parts of West Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone and Yorubaland in Nigeria, Creoles, a composite of African and imported blood and culture, some of whom

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<sup>19</sup>Wilberforce derived direct inspiration for his abolitionist views from John Wesley, in particular from his letter of February 1791 (Cormack 1983, 70).

<sup>20</sup> Without in any way diminishing the influence wielded by Wilberforce and other activists, one needs to acknowledge that the slave economy of the southern American plantation was no economic match for the fast growing age of machine technology (Fyfe 1985, 30–57).

were recaptives or returned slaves, were among the leading classes (Isichei 1995, 162). But in Ghana, the new elite consisted mainly of businessmen and traders, many of whom received their education in schools established by Methodist missions (Kimble 1963, 131–41). It is among these people that Ghanaian Methodism originally took root and found leadership.

In a particularly enlightening study, David Hempton (1996; 1999), surveys the historiography of Methodist growth in Europe and North America. He finds that the predominant themes have to do with Methodist structures, organization, and theology, while little discussion is given to why people converted to Methodism. Hempton states that Methodism's attractiveness lay in its "anti-clericalism, anti-Calvinism, anti-formalism, anti-confessionalism, and anti-elitism. Empowerment was from God, knowledge was from the Scriptures, salvation was available to all and the Spirit was manifested, not in structures and ecclesiastical order, but in freedom and heart religion" (1996, 10). Methodism, therefore, thrived in the "expanding crevices and margins of societies undergoing profound changes of one sort or another. . . . For a religion which itself chipped away at conventional boundary lines of clericalism, gender, age, and education, the most conducive environments were those interstitial and marginal areas where traditional hierarchical structures were either absent or perceived to be antithetical to new interests" (1996, 21, 27). Because it was "an infinitely flexible and adaptable religious species," Methodism attracted the middle class rebels and the activists of society. With equal ease, Methodism functioned within a vernacular religiosity, with all its unpredictable peculiarities, and a centralized bureaucracy (1996, 16–17). As a result, in the social and political dislocation of the first half of the nineteenth century in coastal Ghana, Methodism became the religious component of the new definition of power, influence and identity.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of the Anglican ministry at the Cape Coast Castle, several Fantes became Christians (Hastings 1994, 179). They formed themselves into an informal Bible band and met regularly to read, study the Bible, and pray. In his foreword to Francis Bartels's *Roots of Ghana Methodism*, Francis Chapman Ferguson Grant, the first Ghanaian President of MCG Conference, highlights the devotion and activism of the early Fante pioneers of the Methodist Church: "We see them resolved to study the Word of God as the best rule for Christian living—they were Methodists before they were received into the Methodist Church—and watch them become involved in the lives of their country" (Bartels 1965, v). In this statement Grant encapsulates what most Methodists would agree is the two-fold essence of Methodism—a devotion to the study of the Word of God and a corresponding involvement in the society at large. Bible study and communal involvement were the hallmarks of this group.

It is regrettable that Joseph Smith and William de Graft,<sup>22</sup> the Fante leaders of the group, are not given places of honor in the history of the MCG. As recently as January 1, 2000, when the MCG observed its 165th anniversary, the emphasis in all its literature and

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<sup>21</sup> In its barrier-breaking, women-empowering, unmediated and expressive spirituality, and explosive global spread, Methodism of the nineteenth century interestingly set the pattern for Pentecostalism of the last decades of the twentieth century (Hollenweger 1972; Cox 1995; especially Martin 2002, 7–9).

<sup>22</sup> I will be using the form "de Graft" in line with Andrew Walls in *BDCM*, but when citing others I will keep their rendition intact.

fanfare was on the first British Methodist missionary, Joseph Dunwell. Although Joseph Smith and William de Graft and others really constituted the genesis of the MCG,<sup>23</sup> very little attention was given in the 165<sup>th</sup> anniversary material to the members of the Fante Bible band, who were the ones who extended an invitation to the missionary to come.

The Fante Bible band had a practice of recording minutes of its meetings, and the minutes from the original meeting, October 1, 1831, read as follows: “That, as the Word of God is the best rule a Christian ought to observe, it is herein avoided framing other rules to enforce good conduct; but that the Holy Scriptures must be carefully studied, through which, by the help of the Holy Spirit and faith in Jesus Christ, our minds will be enlightened, and find the way to eternal life”<sup>24</sup> (Southon 1936, 27; Bartels 1965, 8).

As in many places when people study the Bible, there soon arose differences in interpretation. DeGraft and some of the other members of the group disassociated themselves from the band because they perceived that Joseph Smith, the group’s other leader, was too literalistic in his interpretation of the Bible. According to Arthur Southon, Smith

Read the Bible privately, and aloud to his students and what he did not understand, he passed over. Not so in the case of DeGraft and his companions. They were younger and more alert of mind. As has always been the case with intelligent youth in every country, they wanted to know the meaning of what they read. Bible reading in their case provoked thought and discussion. The Book contained its own authority. And in their eyes, they knew it was the Word of God, and that they must live according to its teaching. They perceived that this was not just one more God whose worship could be added to the gods of their fathers. It was a new faith, something wholly different from Africa’s religions, and that in accepting it; they were compelled to break with all their inherited beliefs and customs. (Southon 1936, 25–26)

This quotation identifies the difference between Joseph Smith’s simplistic and literalistic interpretation and de Graft’s more sophisticated interpretation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kwame Bediako states that the MCG is “a church begun by Africans who read the Bible and felt they needed more Bibles. . . . The founders are not Joseph Dunwell and the Methodist Mission in Britain, . . . great people that they were. The beginning, the foundation of MCG, was de Graft and friends in Cape Coast. It is an African church . . . very much an educated, a learned people’s church.” Bediako adds “The founders of Mfantsipim, [MCG’s leading educational institution], Mensah Sarbah, Gaddiel Acquah, and all these—they were authentically African, but Africans who were global. As early as the eighteenth century, they were global people. And therefore, to be African does not mean ethnic, provincial, or racial. We [Akan] have no words for race—black race, white race, etc. To be African is to be global” (interview with author January 17, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Southon compares this Bible Club to the one that the Wesley brothers had at Oxford. He notes, “Wesley and his companions were striving to find fellowship with God and personal holiness in an age of religious indifference and much open evil living. De Graft and his friends sought precisely the same ends in all the darkness of superstition and savage cruelty of vicious Europeans and fierce Ashantis . . . . They followed a prepared course of reading, and entered in a book a ‘minute’ of each day’s proceedings in a manner wholly foreign to Africa at that period. The first ‘minute’ [cited above] reveals their high purpose, and gives a vivid picture of these remarkable African youths” (Southon 1935, 27).

<sup>25</sup> It is possible that Southon is romanticizing an inquirer’s movement into an advanced hermeneutics class. To credit them with “breaking with all their inherited beliefs and customs,” is to devalue what must have been their innate educational principle of learning from the known to the unknown.

The names of the other members of the Bible band were George Blankson (later a member of the Cape Coast legislative council), John Sam, Henry Brew, John Smith, William Brown, John Niezer, John Aggrey, Kobina Mensah Sackey, and Kwabena Mensah. One could conclude from a cursory look at the Anglicized names that these people adopted English culture. But that would be a mistaken judgment. In Ghana, now as well as then, most people have multiple names. These are used in different contexts.<sup>26</sup> The history surrounding this practice is explained by Alex Quaison-Sackey, first African President of the United Nations General Assembly and later Vice-President of MCG. In his book *Africa Unbound* he indicates how pervasive was the influence of Christian missionaries:

Even our names were purposely anglicized in nineteenth century Ghana, in order to indicate that the “bearers” had become Christians and therefore civilized as well. My own name, for example, is Sekyi (pronounced Sechi), but it became Sackey simply because my great uncle who had become a Methodist minister before the run of the last century, wanted it that way. Quaison, meaning the son of Kwei, was adopted by my maternal grandfather in 1896 at school to show his scholarship. Thus, Obu, meaning rock, became Rockson; Kuntu, meaning blanket, became Blankson; and Dadzie, meaning steel, became Steele-Dadzie.<sup>27</sup> (Quaison-Sackey 1963, 52)

In nineteenth-century Ghana, the Anglicized names signaled not only spiritual conversion but also a far-reaching cultural interaction.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the coastal communities of Ghana had had a lengthy association with European powers, an association that gradually changed the power and social dynamics of the country. The British, representing the most powerful European nation in Ghana, preferred the coast as a counterbalance to the Asante, while the Dutch encouraged the domination by the Asante of the coastal regions, especially Fanteland.

The Ghanaian coastal states, small but culturally heterogeneous, gained importance far out of proportion to their size. The colonial order emerged around them and enabled these coastal states to rival in importance the relatively larger centralized states of Ghana’s interior. Starting at first as the centers of trade and later also as administrative, missionary, and educational loci, these West African coastal settlements served as both the frontier and the dispersion point for new ideas and beliefs, while in turn they borrowed customs and institutions from the interior, which they incorporated into the colonial situation. The coastal people’s capacity for absorption as well as adaptation is well documented by Roger S. Gocking in his groundbreaking *Facing Two Ways: Ghana Coastal Communities Under Colonial Rule*. Gocking describes the interaction of the coastal states with European powers:

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<sup>26</sup> The phenomenon of name-change is as ancient as biblical literature. Abraham, father of the three Fertile Crescent’s monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, had a name-change in Genesis 17:5 to indicate his new covenant-relationship with Yahweh. A New Testament example is the disciple Simon, who was renamed Cephas or Peter by Jesus reflecting Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18 that his church would be built on the rock of Peter and his confession.

<sup>27</sup> John Petersen makes a similar argument when he cautions against a wholesale labeling of nineteenth-century Creole society in Sierra Leone as a “mirror image of that upper class life led by the successful oligarchy” (1968, 101–126).

Janus-like, they faced two ways and symbolized the beginning of a new order that represented a fusion of both African and European influences. . . . This process of incorporation paralleled the phases through which colonial rule in general passed. It touched the arrival of missionaries and their contributions to the spread of Western education, the development of an articulate, Western-educated African elite, a flourishing newspaper and literary tradition, and an early fusion of English common law with African customary law. . . . The long history of European and African cultural interaction has contributed to making this area one of the best examples of how much absorption and adaptation there was in this transformative process. (Gocking 1999, 2–3)

Thus, the Anglicization of Ghanaian names reveals more than a one-way absorption of European influence. It also explains the social meanings and differences in approach that Joseph Smith's band contributed, and its later impact on the indigenization of the Methodist Church. The differences in biblical hermeneutics between the two factions within the Fante Bible band mirrored in the larger society between the chiefly class and the new educated elite, were to lead to persecution of de Graft who fell into disfavor with the current governor who was friendlier with Joseph Smith, probably because the latter was more compliant. De Graft was briefly imprisoned and deported from Cape Coast, then resettled at Dixcove. There he came into contact with Captain Potter, whose ship made regular voyages between Bristol and the Gold Coast. When Potter learned that these Bible-believing Christians wanted Bibles, he promised to convey their request to the appropriate authorities in London.<sup>28</sup>

In response to Potter's intervention, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) dispatched Joseph Rhodes Dunwell, a twenty-seven-year-old local preacher as a "foreign" missionary.<sup>29</sup> After an eleven-week sea voyage, Dunwell arrived at Cape Coast on New Year's Day, 1835. George MacLean, the President of the Council of European Merchants in Cape Coast, led his fellow merchants to offer a warm welcome to this young man. The members of the Bible band were ecstatic because for the first time they had someone who had come not as a chaplain to the Europeans at the forts and castles, but primarily as the minister to the Fante Bible band.

In his brief period of ministry, Dunwell strengthened the group by using the indigenous leadership as much as he could. On June 24, 1835, Dunwell died, entrusting the church to those Fante men and women who had preceded him in leadership, namely, Joseph Smith, John Hagan, Thomas Hughes, John Mills, Elizabeth Smith, John Martin, William Brown, John Aggrey, and Hannah Smith (Bartels 1965, 19). The most important contribution of Dunwell's ministry was the reconciliation of the two Bible bands and

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<sup>28</sup> Was the MCG indigenously rooted by accident or design? Although the "accidental" factor might appear to be obvious, one cannot but be impressed by the fact that the local Fante were equal to the task of sustaining their Christian faith and initiating growth and expansion. Thus, it can be argued that the enterprise was intentionally designed to be indigenous. At the same time, it cannot be said that the Fante became Methodists by design, since the Bible band had not heard of the Methodists prior to de Graft's contact with Potter. If Potter himself had not had Methodist sympathies, the Fante Bible band would in all likelihood have associated with the Church Missionary Society or the SPG, thus making the church Anglican.

<sup>29</sup> In Methodist parlance a "local preacher" is a layperson licensed to preach within a circuit, but not ordained to administer the sacraments.

their leaders and also in bringing to Christian faith two Asante princes who were on their way to England (Agbeti 1986, 55).

Fifteen months later, on September 15, 1836, Dunwell's replacement arrived in the persons of the Reverend George Wrigley and his wife Harriet. In his first report to the mission society in England, Wrigley expressed his admiration for the local indigenous Christian leadership that had carried on the work in the absence of expatriate personnel.<sup>30</sup> The Wrigleys rejoiced when other helpers from London, the Reverend Peter Harrop and his wife, arrived in Cape Coast on January 15, 1837.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, Mrs. Harrop died three weeks after landing, and her husband died three days later, on February 8, 1837. That very day Harriet Wrigley also passed away, and nine months later, George Wrigley died. Ghana Methodism honored these five earliest pioneers by burying them underneath the pulpit in the maiden chapel at Cape Coast<sup>32</sup> (Williamson 1965, 14).

Once again, the leadership and day-to-day administration of this isolated fellowship of Ghanaian Methodist believers rested on the shoulders of the local indigenous Ghanaians. The West African coast was proving to be the "white man's grave," and so the leaders had to consider alternative measures if they were to continue their direct connection with the London-based WMMS.<sup>33</sup>

With Ghana being so lethal to European missionaries, it became increasingly clear that the Fante leaders were undoubtedly the ones best placed to oversee the nascent Methodist movement. Ultimately, the Methodists were to concentrate their hopes and aspirations in one man—Thomas Birch Freeman.

### **Thomas Birch Freeman: Patriarch of Ghanaian Methodism**

The accolade "founder of Ghana Methodism" belongs to an Englishman, son of an African father and an English mother who worked in Ghana from 1838 to 1890. Freeman is honored not only for the length of his service in Ghana but also the breadth and reach of his missionary zeal. He helped expand the work of Methodism to the dreaded Asante and Dahomey kingdoms. He was also the first to introduce Methodism to Nigeria. As a person of mixed race, and therefore with some sympathies to Africa and Africans, he used his racial background to his and the church's best advantage, and was a bridge builder in all aspects of his work.<sup>34</sup> His missionary service was not confined to

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<sup>30</sup> Wrigley's singular achievement is recorded by Bartels thus: "He made history when after only eight months in the country, he read the Ten Commandments in Fante on Sunday 28 May, preached in Fante on 20 August and used Fante for baptism on 3 September 1837" (Bartels 1965, 22).

<sup>31</sup> Regrettably not unlike many histories of the age, the first name of Mrs. Harrop is not found in any of the sources.

<sup>32</sup> It is remarkable to note that while fifteen missionaries died between 1834 and 1844, no one died in the following twenty-four years. No great discoveries had then been made in tropical medicine or hygiene to explain this phenomenon. During the following fifty years, forty more expatriate missionaries were sent to Ghana. And yet, the MCG grew faster during the first decade than at any other time. Southon (1936, 81–82) offers many possibilities for understanding this occurrence, but it seems that MCG grew best when the indigenous leaders had limited recourse to expatriate staff. Had the ratio between the expatriate and national staff been more balanced from the outset, the local people might have associated Methodism with the foreigners and not with their own kith and kin.

<sup>33</sup> The Basel Mission, operating to the northeast of Cape Coast, in the Accra and Akwapim areas of Ghana, had experimented with sending missionaries from the West Indies, where the climate was similar to that of coastal Ghana, and yet they had not fared any better (Williamson 1965, 3–16).

<sup>34</sup> Harrison M. Wright writes that Freeman displayed considerable sympathy and understanding toward his African brethren. Even though Freeman disliked many African ways, he was always amiable and outgoing



evangelism, but included development projects in the fields of education, agriculture, and industry. Even in later years, when he was no longer in the employ of the MCG, Freeman put the interests of the local people above that of his European countrymen and thereby invoked the ire of his English compatriots.

Information on Freeman's background in England is rather scanty, but some highlights are worth repeating. A botanist who was forced to choose between his gardening profession and being a local preacher, Freeman chose the latter at just the time when the WMMS needed a volunteer for the West African coast (Birtwhistle 1983, 56). Isichei's interpretation of the educational and professional backgrounds of many of the early pioneer missionaries is that "the mission field gave them careers that England would have denied them . . . a social emancipation of the underprivileged classes. The facile identification of Christianity with material progress, which they so often saw as a panacea for Africans, was an extrapolation from the realities of their own lives" (Isichei 1995, 77).

Thomas and Elizabeth (nee Booth) Freeman arrived at Cape Coast on January 3, 1838. The Ghanaian Methodist leader Joseph Smith accompanied them all the way from England.<sup>35</sup> They were warmly received by the Cape Coast Methodists who offered, "a poor present of 37 fowls, 43 yams, and a few bunches of shallots" and also thoughtfully added, "a basket of corn for feeding the fowls" (Bartels 1965, 31). On their arrival, they were saddened to hear that George Wrigley had died two months earlier. Within six weeks, Elizabeth Freeman, while nursing her husband who had contracted fever, fell victim to it herself and died on February 20. This was a sad fulfillment of Freeman's gloomy forecast in response to the call to Ghana: "It is necessary for me to go; but it may not be necessary for me to live" (Bartels 1965, 28).

In this setting where death was a recurring disruption, and most of the early missionaries gained little appreciation for the local culture, Freeman won the admiration of many Ghanaians by his "infinite patience with the endless ceremonies, salutations and palavers," so that he was counted as an African, and was referred to as "the great white prophet" (Birtwhistle 1983, 57; 1950, 97).

Given the shortness of service of the previous English missionaries, Freeman and his leadership team focused on setting up and equipping an indigenous force to perform the work. On June 10, 1838, the congregation dedicated the first chapel, the Cape Coast Wesley "cathedral." The dedication program reflected Freeman's missionary agenda. The morning featured a lay preacher's meeting and training session, followed by the church administrative quarterly meeting.<sup>36</sup> One of the first actions of the administrative board was to accept de Graft as a candidate for ministry.<sup>37</sup> The day of dedication ended with a

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in his personal relationships (Freeman 1968, xxiv–xxvi). In Freeman's *Journal*, he often cites the collaboration and assistance he enjoyed from Africans. See for example p. 74, where he states "Had not the people exerted themselves exceedingly, it could not have been so forward; but I am glad to say they assisted nobly, both in labour and contributions."

<sup>35</sup> The fact that Smith accompanied the Freemans in coming to Cape Coast highlights the initiative of the local leadership and points to the indigenous role in the growth of the MCG.

<sup>36</sup> The Quarterly Meeting is the highest decision-making body of a number of Methodist societies grouped as a circuit.

<sup>37</sup> One of the most significant results of Dunwell's short ministry was the reconciliation of the two Bible bands; at this time de Graft and his group were part of the Cape Coast group.

Watchnight service with four preachers each addressing the congregation.<sup>38</sup> Freeman demonstrated by this celebratory program that he was interested in promoting an indigenous ministry, a shared ministry of equal participation by clergy and laity, with the worshiping community sustained by the preaching of the Word. He completed the building and dedicated the very first chapel ever to be constructed in Ghana independent of the forts. Here is further evidence that the MCG had non-establishment and non-missionary roots and thrust, even though Freeman provided a key role.

Three months later, on September 3, 1838, Freeman organized the first missionary meeting presided over by Governor George MacLean. It was a memorable day starting with a prayer meeting at 6 a.m., a marriage ceremony for six couples at 7:30 a.m.,<sup>39</sup> a Quarterly Meeting at 11 a.m., and the afternoon given to the construction of a platform for the evening ceremony to begin at 7:15 p.m. The chairing of the meeting by MacLean pioneered a practice in Ghanaian Methodism in which secular and political leaders have chaired the church's missionary meetings. At these meetings, missionaries give their reports and launch appeals for funds for the extension and expansion of their work.<sup>40</sup>

As a result of this meeting, Freeman and the Cape Coast Methodists received and accepted a call from a group of Fante Methodists gathered in Accra to extend Methodist ministry there. At Winneba, where a pupil of de Graft was now serving, some twenty people regularly assembled for worship. This was to be the pattern in the expansion of the church; traders or workers would relocate and take with them their Christian faith, and in time, they would request assistance from the central office. (It was in this manner that the Accra group, in the suburb of Jamestown, the hub of British commercial activity, had come into existence.)

By the end of 1838 Freeman's attention turned to the greatest challenge facing the land: the menace of the political and military might of the Asante kingdom. Bartels recalls, "Members at Cape Coast had grown up in . . . undetached houses with specially designed exits to facilitate escape from one through the other in time of attack by their northern enemy. Their information about Ashanti consisted of 'tales of horror, wretchedness and cruelty,' which expanded with telling and retelling and terrified them as much as they made Freeman restless 'to commence Missionary operations'" (Bartels 1965, 37). The Fante Christians were concerned that Freeman might never return alive from such a journey or might not even be allowed to see the king of Asante, the *Asantehene*. Nevertheless, in an exercise of Christian hope and charity, they collected sixty English pounds toward the cost of the first missionary journey of Freeman to Kumasi, the capital of the Asante kingdom.

John Mills and James Hayford, two Fante Christians and traders in Kumasi, had been conducting Christian worship services under the supervision of the king at his palace, and so Freeman was not the first to introduce Christianity to Kumasi.<sup>41</sup> What

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<sup>38</sup> The Watchnight Service is usually held on the last night of the year. It features several sermons, musical pieces, testimonies, and prayer.

<sup>39</sup> It is possible that this mass wedding ceremony was to reduce cost as well as Christianize this all-important social contract.

<sup>40</sup> This was a British practice. In the nineteenth century, such meetings were held in places such as Exeter Hall on the anniversary of charities.

<sup>41</sup> The fact that the king presided over Christian worship in his palace calls into question some of the fearful tales of Asante cruelty. From a missiologist's standpoint, it is obvious that the Asante mission followed a top-down approach with royal sponsorship as a key feature.

Freeman brought along with his presentation of the gospel was the power of a colonial force, which, when accepted, offered the modern benefits of education and English culture. The *Asantehene* had placed limits on those who could worship with the Fante traders. Even though services were held with his courtiers at the palace and in his presence, outsiders were not allowed to participate in Christian worship. Ultimately, though, Freeman's visits would lead to ordinary Asante people being allowed to join in Christian services.

Freeman's record of his dramatic first visit with the *Asantehene* has become part of missionary lore and need not be repeated here in full. When Freeman's requests to start a church or build a school were both rejected by the king, he returned to the coast to concentrate on his circuit work, stretching from Dixcove, Komenda, Elmina, Cape Coast, Anomabu, Egyaa, Saltpond, and Winneba in the west, to Accra in the east with the help of a team of indigenous Fante Methodists. The group was comprised of de Graft, then a probationer; five local preachers, Joseph Smith, John Hagan, John Mills, John Martin, and George Blankson; and fifteen exhorters. Successive chapels were opened and dedicated at Anomabu, and Winneba, and others were started at Saltpond, Abaasa, and Komenda.

After completing the journal of his visit to Kumasi, Freeman sent it to the mission committee in London, with a recommendation by George MacLean, President of the Council of European Merchants at Cape Coast, who in the absence of a governor oversaw the interests of the British government. Upon receipt of the report in England, Freeman was invited, along with de Graft, to visit London. Accepting the invitation was easier to contemplate because just about that time Brooking Mycock and his brother Josiah Mycock had arrived from England to complement the leadership of the indigenous Christians in Freeman's absence.

Freeman and de Graft visited London at a time of financial crisis in the affairs of the missionary society. The WMMS had just closed a year with a deficit of over twenty thousand pounds (Bartels 1965, 45). And yet, they enthusiastically endorsed Freeman's proposal to extend the work to Ashanti. The two were sent around churches to preach and raise awareness and funds for the project, and none was so memorable as when de Graft preached at the Langton Street Chapel where Captain Potter had his membership and first told the story of the Cape Coast Bible Band. De Graft's account bears re-telling:

I was introduced into the pulpit in fear and trembling. I preached on the text, "Behold how he loved him." After the service, the kind people pressed to shake my hands and to welcome me to their country and to strengthen me in the work of the Lord. Mrs. Potter, the widow of Captain Potter, the good man who promised to do all for us to get us a Missionary and Bibles, when he saw me in Africa, was present in the Chapel and was exceedingly affected and wept much for joy, that she had been spared to see the fruits of the love of God. [Said she], "Once we sent missionaries to Africa, but now here is an African also who, through our instrumentality by the grace of God, is preaching Christ Jesus unto us." (Bartels 1965, 48)

This visit was significant for Ghanaian Methodism in three ways. First, because of the enormous amount of money pledged; second, the help that de Graft gave to an ongoing translation work, and third and most importantly, "This leading African worker in Ghana Methodism gained considerably in stature and came back with increased self-

confidence; for while Freeman talked in England about what was, and what must be, de Graft was a living example of what could be” (Bartels 1965, 48).<sup>42</sup> In addition, this mission trip was an example of reverse mission, affirming the earliest partnership model of mission as well as the international network of Methodists. Freeman returned to Ghana with Lucinda Cowan as his second wife. Back in Ghana, after less than seven months, Lucinda succumbed to fever and died on August 25, 1841. Later on Freeman married Rebecca Morgan, an early Fante convert (Birtwhistle 1983, 61).

Back in Ghana in November–December 1841, Freeman visited Kumasi again and also ventured to Nigeria, being the very first minister to conduct a Christian worship in the palace at Abeokuta. Isichei records, “The modern missionary enterprise in Nigeria began in 1842, when Thomas Birch Freeman and a Fante Christian, William de Graft, founded a Methodist mission in Badagry” (Isichei 1995, 171).

Not having any personal assistants to keep track of expenses nor having any formal checks on his expansion projects, Freeman was found by WMMS to be inept in financial accountability, and in 1857 he was relieved of his role as head of the WMMS ministry in Ghanaian Methodism.<sup>43</sup> Sixteen years later Freeman returned to the fold of the MCG, at the age of sixty-four, and began a second phase of ministry alongside his son of the same name. Even though he had long been out of church office, he was able to initiate several innovations, such as the popular camp meetings (Birtwhistle 1983, 69). He also preached the Jubilee sermon during the celebrations of the mission in 1885. He died in Accra on August 12, 1890.

Being a mulatto<sup>44</sup> was for Freeman both a bane and a blessing. With Africans, he was known as a friend who understood their culture and respected their customs. With the English and other Europeans, he was despised as too close in sympathy to the Africans (Ellingworth 1997, 50–57). During the period after Freeman was forced to resign from the employ of the WMMS, he was employed by the colonial administration and given charge of a financial division. For someone who had just been set aside from leadership in the Methodist Church for financial maladministration, it is incredible that he immediately got employment in the civil service as a financial administrator. It is especially surprising when one realizes that even if he had been adept at keeping financial

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<sup>42</sup> Freeman’s visit captured the attention of the political establishment as well. Birtwhistle records that the Select Committee of the House of Commons in session in 1842, receiving reports relative to West Africa, stated, “We would here acknowledge the great services rendered to religion and civilization on this coast by the Wesleyan body; they have even established a friendly communication with the barbarous court of the Ashantee; which promises results important in every way; and, indeed, little in the way of instruction would have been done without them” (Birtwhistle 1983, 62).

<sup>43</sup> Freeman seems to have overspent his budget not in careless extravagance but with an unflinching determination not to limit God’s work. According to Birtwhistle, Freeman’s passion for the spread of the gospel made him unmindful of “what the world calls the main thing in these matters” (Birtwhistle 1960, 100). The WMMS sent two gentlemen, William West to be the financial secretary on the Gold Coast, and Daniel West to report on the state of the work. Unfortunately, Daniel died before reaching home. In the meantime, he had sent ahead a report, which states *inter alia*, “God has, by means of his servants, wrought a great work. We have good chapels and schools and houses, and large attentive congregations . . . The whole country is open to us. In many villages and towns through which I passed, one uniform state of feeling was evident—one desire earnestly expressed: ‘Send us teachers and missionaries’ Oh. That we had the means” (Birtwhistle 1983, 67).

<sup>44</sup> I am aware that the term “mulatto” may sound awkward in modern ears, but for purposes of historical consistency I have decided to retain it to show how Freeman’s biracial background affected his work on the West African coast. Sundkler’s work (2000, 208–09) also retains this terminology.

records, he would have been challenged by a system which had sterling, dollars, cowries, cotton, and gold dust in use as currencies (Ellingworth 1997, 53). It is obvious then that the pool of financial talent among the expatriate community was thin at that phase.

Freeman's popularity among the coastal people was put to the test when the colonial administration put him in charge of the unpopular poll tax. Freeman, earnest as ever, persuaded the coastal Africans to pay the tax, believing that a substantial portion of the collected income would be spent on road building and other public services. However, he was disappointed when almost the entire amount collected was spent on salaries of officials, many of whom he considered to be undeserving (Ellingworth 1997, 53). In addition, Freeman felt that the British military officers, who often lacked tact in relating to the local population, exercised undue influence on the activities of the colonial administration.

The cumulative effect of all of these issues was that Freeman ended up being dismissed from the colonial administration as well. His lack of financial management, his sympathetic predisposition toward the Africans, his disappointment with the colonial administration on the use of the poll tax, and his low regard for military officers—none of these endeared him to the Europeans who had employed him. But as Ellingworth concludes, "He shows truly missionary zeal for the development of the country and the well being of its people; matters in which . . . his adversaries show no interest at all" (Ellingworth 1997, 56). Freeman's fate was similar to that of most persons of mixed race who were employed in the early days of the colonial administration: they experienced persecution as a result of the racial climate surrounding colonial administration (Kimble 1963, 65–67). In the larger world, racial attitudes began hardening in the 1840s with the beginnings of "scientific" racism.

### ***Nananom Mpow: Fante Christians Challenge the Traditional Powers***

African Christianity is celebrated as offering many gifts to the world church. One of its most enduring features is the idea of a direct, divine intervention in everyday life and the healing that the church brings to the body, soul, and mind. This characteristic is a fusion of both biblical and traditional African worldviews. Where the church has acknowledged this integration as a necessary step in inculturation, the effect has been magnetic. A significant episode in the history of the MCG brings these issues to the fore.

On the way to Cape Coast from Accra, one passes through the Mankessim rotary (roundabout) that is about two-thirds of the way from Accra. Many who go that route do not see the thriving commercial activity that takes place in Mankessim, the ancient Fante city just about a quarter of a mile to the right of the rotary. The role of Mankessim in the political and religious history of the Fante people is arguably one of the least chronicled aspects of Fante society. Mankessim served as the center for the consolidation and subsequent dispersal of important Fante groups in the early days of the emigration southward from Takyiman to the Gold Coast littoral. In subsequent years, as the Fante paid their visits to Mankessim, they "acknowledged as their chief idol one . . . known as *Nanaam*" (Kemp, in McCaskie 1990, 133).<sup>45</sup> In addition to the written sources that attest to the central significance of the traditional primal religion of *Nananom* at Mankessim, oral traditions also confirm that between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>45</sup> The Fante word "Nana" refers to elders, chiefs, grandfathers and ancestors; the plural is "Nananom."

*Nananom Mpow* had a pervasive influence on the political and religious history of the Fante people. Thomas McCaskie, a social anthropologist and historian, chronicles the religious significance of this grove. He argues that because historians have “tended overwhelmingly to see *Nananom Mpow* in instrumental terms, as an actor in the shifting kaleidoscope of political history,” they have not “accorded [*Nananom Mpow*] a depth of analytic discussion consonant with its looming presence in Fante oral traditions” (McCaskie 1990, 134).

According to McCaskie, the *Borbor Mfantse* (ancient Fante) who immigrated into southern Ghana were organized in five distinct *mboron* (groups, quarters, or wards; sing., *boron*). The *kurentsi amanfu boron* was the northwest; the *nkusukum boron* was the southwest, present day Mankessim; and the *edumadzi boron* was the southeast, present-day Ekumfi. The others were *bentsir boron* (the north), present-day Enyan, and the *anaafu boron* (the east), present-day Abura. The Fante groups around Anomabu, A beadze, and Akatakyi are thought to have come into being through a process of fission from the groups named above. These were all under the leadership of three legendary leaders: *Oburumankoma* (whale), *Odapagyan* (eagle), and *Oson* (elephant)—patriarchs and priests who, in addition to their magical regalia, also possessed *mfoa* (short swords) signifying their judicial authority. They also represented the three-tiered system of the natural order and the mastery that each animal is said to have had over its sphere (Bartels 1965, 55). The place of interment of these three leaders, in the thicket of trees some ten miles from the city of Mankessim, became in time the “habitat of ghosts [*asamanpow*] or of spiritual powers inhering in nature [*abosompow*]” (McCaskie 1990, 135). In addition to serving as the spiritual watchdog over the interests of the Fante community, the *Nananom Mpow* became the mnemonic of the ancient Fante’s historical identity. It was here in the grove that histories of the people and especially of royal families were recounted.

In time the people of the *nkusukum boron* (the southwest ward), custodians of the *Nananom Mpow*, became the first among equals among the Fante groups. This development was partly because of deference to age, experience, and leadership qualities, but principally, according to McCaskie, because of the “nimbus of magical power” associated with their oversight of the ancestral grove. Even after years of decline in its real power, Mankessim continued to be recognized as having a unique mythico-historical status among the Fante as a result of the fact that it was the source and final arbiter in matters of Fante custom and law. McCaskie argues that to locate the significance of Mankessim solely in the political history of the Fante people would be a defective analysis (McCaskie 1990, 138). John K. Fynn, the leading Fante historian, agrees that even though “*Nananom Mpow* as the shrine of the Borbor Fante undoubtedly became a most sacred spot in Fanteland and its priests wielded great influence in Fante society . . . *Nananom Mpow* was certainly not a foundation upon which the Fante sought to erect a national political system”<sup>46</sup> (Fynn 1987, 117).

Each of the *mboron* had its own communal *abosom* (gods) from which they could seek the necessary coverage through ritual practices for communal protection, good harvests, and the resolution of individual problems. With intractable difficulties and

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<sup>46</sup> Similarities abound between the oracular nationalistic directives from *Nananom Mpow* and the Shona’s *Mwari* cult (Daneel 1970). It needs to be pointed out, however, that the Fantes did not consider the *Nananom Mpow* to be the abode of a Supreme Being as in the case of the Shona view of the Matapo Hills.

issues of war and peace affecting all of *Mfantseman* (Fante nation), *Nananom Mpow* was the final arbiter and enjoyed the highest place in a hierarchy of efficacy. All in *Mfantseman* agreed that the most serious judicial and religious matters were the ultimate preserve of *Nananom Mpow*. In 1806, the *Nananom Mpow* oracle had indicated that the Fante states were in grave mortal danger and advised against military confrontation with Asante. When the war ended disastrously for the Fante states, it was further proof of the efficacy of the ancestral grove—not only in predicting defeat but also in exhibiting fairness in interethnic affairs (Christensen 1954, 16).

Describing the pre-colonial period when European accounts of traditional primal religious order were all too derogatory, Brodie Cruickshank, a colonial official, offered a rather salutary appraisal of the beneficial role of the *abosom* (gods) and the *akomfoo* (ritual attendants) as an “engine of civil government.” It was the *abosom* and *Nananom Mpow*, he wrote, that were to be credited with the atmosphere of public safety and trust that prevailed in *Mfantseman* at that time. The British were indebted “to fetish, as a police agent,” contended Brodie Cruickshank.

Without this powerful ally, it would have been found impossible to maintain order, which has characterized the country during the last twenty years, with the physical force of the government. The extraordinary security afforded to property in the most remote districts, the great safety with which packages of gold of great value are transmitted by single messengers for hundreds of miles, and the facility with which lost or stolen property is generally recovered, have excited the astonishment of Europeans newly arrived in the country.

(Cruickshank in McCaskie 1990, 136)

Thus, the belief system of the Fante people before the arrival of Europeans enabled both the Fante people and the European traders to work in a context of a harmonious and law-abiding social order. By the eighteenth century *Nananom Mpow*'s role in Fante politics had become so significant that Fante states deferred to it not only in the areas of beliefs and social ideology but also as the representation of order in its command of communal and individual allegiances and in its symbolizing of the collective identity of the Fante people.

De Graft, the Fante pioneer of Gold Coast Methodism, recalled (albeit in an account heavily filtered by his Christian conversion), that he had been informed that the *Nananom Mpow* manifested itself by a whirlwind thrice a year. On these occasions, which took place at night, the earth shook and the sacred trees of the grove were seen to bow down. When an offering was made by the fifty male and female ritual attendants, its reception by the gods was signaled as it spun howling and screaming and then disappeared. De Graft argued that since one could not make an objective analysis of all the mysterious circumstances surrounding the rituals, he was inclined to accept the claim of informants that the attendants had accomplices up in the tree who hauled up the offerings. In his Christian understanding of this traditional primal religion, the entire procedure was sheer trumpery, purporting to meet a deeply felt but misguided spiritual need (McCaskie 1990, 142).

In 1831 the king of Asante agreed to peace terms with the English and their allies on the coast. The changes in Fante society in the early nineteenth century occurred on several fronts: economic, political, and social. First, the abolition of the slave trade by Britain and other European powers removed the role of the Fante slave merchants as

intermediaries between Asante and the British and other European powers on the coast. Second, there arose a new mercantile exchange that was based on “legitimate trade” and bypassed the traditional rulers (a factor that spawned a *nouveau riche* group and undermined the traditional concepts of hierarchy and order). Third, the Bond of 1844, which imposed English common law and the English judicial system on *Mfantseman*, ultimately displaced the judicial authority of such institutions as *Nananom Mpow*.<sup>47</sup>

The fourth factor, as noted by McCaskie, was the beginning of the work of the Wesleyan Methodist mission among the Fante people (1990, 144). Although the attendants of *Nananom Mpow*, in 1836, categorically condemned any connection with Christianity, the gospel and European cultural forces continued to advance. The advent of Wesleyan Christianity in coastal Gold Coast introduced formal schooling outside of the European preserve of the castle where it had been restricted to European and mulatto children. (The introduction of Wesleyan Christianity was in the eyes of many people synonymous with the advent of the English school system on the coast.) Given this background, one can sympathize with Nana Eduma Kuma, the chief of Mankessim who in 1834, is reported by Chapman to have expressed his misgivings about a fiat from the ancestral grove forbidding all contacts with Christianity. Chapman states,

[The chief] has often been told by his fetish priests, that should he permit Christianity to be introduced into his town, consequences the most serious will be the result and the most evil effects would follow; to these assertions his reply is—I do not see how this should be the case. I look upon Cape Coast, and upon Anomaboe and various other towns where they have teachers and no evil consequences ensue, on the contrary, those places are better and more prosperous than formerly. Why then should this not be the case with my town. If I can procure a teacher, I will do it. (Chapman, in McCaskie 1990, 145)

It was in this context that the confrontation between Gold Coast Methodism and the *Nananom Mpow* religious institution took place. With the tacit approval of the Mankessim chief, Nana Kuma, and under the influence of the Wesleyan Methodist mission, a local Christian took up residence with a community of Christian converts at Asaafa, close to Mankessim. The Methodist Christians there engaged the attendants of *Nananom Mpow* in petty harassment until one of the senior leaders at the grove, Akweesi, was converted to Christianity. He then cut down one of the trees of the sacred grove and thereby incurred the displeasure of the other *Nananom Mpow* leaders. Up until that time the Christians had enjoyed the tacit patronage of Nana Kuma, but he was so enraged by this act that he sided with other chiefs in *Mfantseman* who burned down the Christian settlements and drove out the converts. The Christian refugees moved from village to village where they were refused refuge and shelter until their plight came to the attention of the British officials in Cape Coast (Sundkler 2000, 204–05).

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<sup>47</sup> On March 6, 1844, eight African leaders and the British lieutenant governor signed an agreement defining British jurisdiction in the area, which came to be known as the Protectorate. Technically, the British were allowed to administer justice in this area when capital punishment was involved, but their actual influence was the molding of Fante customs to the general principles of English Law (Owusu-Ansah and McFarland 1995, 60).



Cruikshank, the colonial judicial assessor, found both parties at fault. He required each side to pay compensatory damage to the other, and the Christians were barred from returning to Asaafa.<sup>48</sup>

The significance of the intervention of the British judicial assessor goes beyond the mere settlement of peace in an environment of fractured relationships. It marked the beginning of the imposition of British law on intertribal affairs in the Gold Coast. In one singular act it showed the chiefs of *Mfantseman*, themselves displaced by the new merchant class, that the British would not tolerate any challenge to their authority. But most fundamentally, this case challenged the collective Fante identity that had revolved around the *Nananom Mpow*. After this incident, it became obvious that multiple centers of identity could be established for *Mfantseman*. In this case, an alternative had been established in Fante Methodism, whereby people who were expected to pay allegiance to *Nananom Mpow* could flout its sacred honor and any negative consequence would be confined to being censured by British law as disturbers of the social peace, but not as religious rebels.

Fante Christians celebrated this victory in pageants as a triumph of the Christian faith over a pagan establishment that used deceit and treachery to hold captive the people of *Mfantseman*. The Christian religion was seen as liberation from the fear that is induced in *abosomsorfo*: idol worship. (Ultimately, Freeman baptized several converts from the sacred grove.) The Christian significance of this victory over *Nananom Mpow* went far beyond the Fante collective cultural identity and religious coherence; it was the very usurping of the role played by traditional authorities in *Mfantseman*. Wesleyan Christianity was seen to have displaced the religious authority of the *Nananom Mpow* much as the new merchant class had displaced the financial and social authority of the chiefs (Sanneh 1999, 2000).<sup>49</sup>

One of the recurring criticisms leveled against missionaries was that they were the willing handmaids of colonialism, and that expatriate missions enabled European powers to take over the lives and governance of the people. But in the *Nananom Mpow* episode there was a confluence of the role and interests of the colonial authorities, the missionaries, and the local Christian groups. They were all aligned on one side against an enduring traditional institution. By sheer combination of their forces, they managed to displace *Nananom Mpow's* importance in the Fante cultural and religious landscape.

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<sup>48</sup> Kuma, who had been persuaded to participate in the court case by other Fante chiefs, reneged on his promise to pay damages and so a second hearing was called at which he eventually acquiesced to the dictates of the court.

<sup>49</sup> One gets a sense that this transformation in Fante society involved more than the ascendancy of the Christian faith over the traditional Fante religion. The very heart of the Christian message was being redefined within the Fante spiritual and political landscape. Fante historian J. B. Crayner has written a number of books on *Nananom Mpow* in the Fante language. In one of these he reconstructs the evangelistic dialogue between Akweesi and Kweesiar Ata: "Akweesi inquired, 'What are you trading?' The hunter Kweesiar Ata responded, 'The gospel is my trade.' Akweesi further inquired, 'What is the medium of exchange?' Ata replied, 'Good life, patience, forgiveness, and love—these are the medium of exchange in my trade,' Akweesi then asked to be given this treasure. In response, Kweesiar Ata began telling him about Joseph's tribulations, Job's trials, the difficulties that the children of Israel encountered in the wilderness, the fiery furnace into which the three Hebrew men were thrown, Daniel in the lion's den, and finally Jesus' life, from his birth to his death" (Crayner 1967, 68, my trans.).

The final word here belongs to the Ghanaian Methodist minister, Timothy Laing, who as the one in charge of the Anomabu circuit, was the direct overseer of the events recounted above:

Great is the bloodless triumph, which Christianity has achieved over idolatry in this country. In consequence of the recent exposure of the tricks connected with the worship of fetish, the confidence of the generality of people here, and in the neighbourhood, in fetish, is very much shaken. The whole Fantes [sic], now forsake the national gods of the Fantes, and no one goes to their grove to consult them now. The present state of the people is that they now stand halting between two opinions. Our energies are therefore required to win them for Christ.<sup>50</sup> (Bartels 1965, 60)

### **William Wadé Harris: Contextualizing Mission Christianity**

Although the argument that the emergence of the AICs was a response to the “failure in love” of Western missionaries has some validity, it can also be argued that AICs utilized and transformed mission Christianity into an African phenomenon (Barrett 1968, 97, 154; Anderson 2001).<sup>51</sup> From this perspective, AICs were primarily establishing a reformed and contextualized form of Christianity. The examples of William Wadé Harris and Samson Oppong amply demonstrate this fact.

Of Harris, a contemporary French missionary recalled, “His faith is nourished by verses borrowed from the Scriptures. He lives in a supernatural world in which the people, ideas, the affirmations, cosmology and the eschatology of the Bible are more real than the things he sees and hears materially” (Gollock 1928, 199–200). Harris had already lived a somewhat dramatic life before he experienced what he called his “second conversion.” This second conversion propelled him to become the catalyst for what Adrian Hastings has called “the most extraordinarily successful one-man evangelical crusade that Africa has ever known” (Hastings, 1976, 10).

From the Glebo ethnic group, born in Cape Palmas in Liberia, Harris was initially attracted to the (African-American) Zion Episcopal American Methodists who taught him how to read and write the English language as well as his own mother tongue. Harris also served under the ministry of the Episcopalians as teacher, warden, and principal of a small boarding school. Later on, he became an advocate for British control of the area in a period of intense conflict between the indigenous population and expatriate blacks from America—a political activism that landed him behind bars. In 1910 while in prison, Harris experienced three trance-visitations from the Angel Gabriel. He was told to abandon “civilized” clothing, including his leather shoes, don a white robe, and preach Christian baptism.

Joseph E. Casely-Hayford, a leading Methodist Gold Coast barrister at the time, records the following:

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<sup>50</sup> This is probably a justifiable propagandist hyperbole, but to state that no Fante consulted the national gods is to be taken with a grain of salt.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett records that AICs saw the missionaries as mounting an attack against African institutions like polygyny, witchcraft and the ancestors. This “failure in love” was primarily insensitivity to African culture, missionary paternalism, and a failure to distinguish between the good and bad elements in African tradition and especially a failure to explore how traditional aspects of culture could be utilized in African Christianity (Anderson 2001b, 278–79).

Of his call, he speaks with awe. It seems as if God made the soul of Harris a soul of fire . . . . He has learned the lesson of those whose lips have been touched by live coal from the altar to sink himself in God. . . . When we are crossed in ordinary life, we never forgive. When God crosses our path and twists our purpose unto his own, he can make a mere bamboo cross a power unto the reclaiming of souls. God has crossed the path of this humble Glebo man and he has had the sense to yield. He has suffered his will to be twisted out of shape and so he carries about the symbol of the cross. (Hayford 1915, 16–17)

Harris's missionary strategy was to call on people to abandon and destroy their fetishes, turn to the one true and living God, be baptized and forgiven by the Savior, follow the commandments of God, and live in peace. He organized people for prayer and worship in their own language, using African dance rhythms and African musical instruments. Wadé Harris asked his followers to "wait for the white man with the Book." His preaching and ministry was usually accompanied by exorcisms and spiritual power confrontations. As converts knelt before him, he baptized them from his baptismal bowl, placing his Bible on the heads of the people as a symbolic protection against the powers of evil, especially that which came from the possession of fetishes. While many in the mainline churches would have preferred that he offer religious instruction prior to the baptism of the initiates, Harris counterargued that a public profession of faith and commitment in an African culture was a powerful inducement to total conversion.

Within a period of eighteen months, he baptized more than a hundred thousand people. Geographically, he covered Liberia (heavily influenced by the African-American expatriate and politically independent population), the French colony of the Ivory Coast (Cote D'Ivoire), and the British area of the western Gold Coast (Ghana). He admonished his followers to join any local church of their choosing, and as a result the numbers of members in Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist churches swelled as they received the fruits of his labor. The churches initially welcomed these members despite the continuing practice of polygamy, which Harris had tolerated. However, the expatriate missionaries in charge of the mainline denominations insisted on monogamy, thus causing some of the new converts to leave the churches. Where there were no local churches, Harris established Christian communities under the leadership of twelve people he appointed as apostles—hence the name of one of his successor movements in Ghana and elsewhere, the Twelve Apostles Church.

In 1914, Harris who had come under the influence of Charles Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement, predicted that the war then brewing in Europe would be a judgment on the civilized world. Even though Harris led a peaceful Christian movement, the authorities in the Ivory Coast feared a mass movement of Africans, who would not be under the control of either the mission establishment or French administration. Subsequently Harris was barred from entering the Ivory Coast, even though he had preached submission to the authorities, denounced alcoholic abuse and adultery, and generally brought about a moral as well as hygienic transformation in Ivory Coast.

Harris's legacy was an interethnic, intercolonial, interdenominational mass movement that transformed traditional religious practices by purging its worst elements and investing other aspects with Christian meaning. This lay-led religious movement caused a proliferation of African Initiated Churches (AICs) either directly as a result of

Harris's work or indirectly as a result of his example. Unlike other prophets, Harris advised his followers to send their children to the English schools, thereby breaking the initial resistance of African prophetism to education and modernity (Shank 1994, 162). Most analysts credit Harris with sowing the seeds of African Christian independency in the first quarter of the last century and with popularizing some of the earliest attempts at contextualizing Christianity (Shank 1994; Hastings 1994; Sundkler 2000). Harris's work is in continuity with the mission enterprise.

As far as the MCG was concerned, Harris's influence was phenomenal.<sup>52</sup> David Shank notes that there was a general breakthrough for Protestant missions in West Africa as a result of the Harris ministry. "[I]n Ghana, the Methodist Church, was confronted with more than 8,000 people in the Axim area requesting church membership, with village after village requesting catechists and schools" (Shank 1994, 161).

The Methodists in Ivory Coast seem to have had an upper hand when their expatriate leader, the Reverend William J. Platt, sent an emissary to Harris in 1926. The envoy returned with this testament from Harris: "All the men, women, and children who were called and baptized by me must enter the Wesleyan Methodist Church. . . . No one must enter [join] the Roman Catholic Church if he wishes to be faithful to me. Mr. Platt, the Director of our Methodist Church, is appointed by me as my successor to the Head of the churches which I founded" (Sundkler 2000, 201).

Although the impact of this testament extended to the neighboring countries of Ivory Coast and Ghana, it would have had an even greater influence on the MCG except for the fact that the Methodists started to enforce monogamy and the Methodist principle of self-support and tithing. John Ahui, a chief's son in the Ivory Coast and a church choir leader, revolted against the missionary authorities. He took it upon himself to visit Harris in Liberia and returned with a message to the effect that church membership should not be based on payment of money, and, though polygamy was not an ideal form of marriage, converts did not need to divorce their wives to be fully engaged in the life of the churches.

On one hand, Harris's ministry exposed the limitations that expatriate, non-African missionaries experienced in their efforts to evangelize Africans. As Lamin Sanneh has argued,

Historians struck by the survival in Christian Africa of vestiges of European influence will do well to remember that it was a scholasticised faith that came to Africa, and that in its European form the church demanded little engagement with local priorities and attitudes. Jesus of Nazareth was swallowed up in

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<sup>52</sup> There is an account (MCG Inaugural Conference Program 1961, 26–27) that bears witness to the phenomenal impact of Harris's ministry on MCG. "The previous minister at Axim had warned the members to keep away from "that false prophet" or they would run the risk of being put out of membership. Ernest Bruce (A Ghanaian Methodist minister) however, was less hasty in his judgment, and waited until he had met Harris himself. When Harris came to greet him, he demanded to see his Bible. He saw that the book Harris placed in his hands was the Authorised Version, so he warmly welcomed him. He offered him the use of the school and the chapel. When the time for service drew near, people from far and near poured in, bearing their loads of charms. After preaching to them, Harris called forth those professing salvation, and began baptising them. This went on for hour after hour, to a thousand a day. Still the people continued to come. Harris had time neither to rest nor to eat. As he baptised people he urged them to join the local church. After baptising ten thousand people in Axim, Harris left. But his converts remained to fill the Methodist churches through the Nzima district. Some fell away, but the majority remained and grew into Christian manhood."

abstract dogma, his early life refined as fuel for enlightened minds. Encountering such a religion, Africans soon discovered its inadequacies for the flesh-and-blood issues of their very different societies. The bracing religious commitment needed for innovative cultural innovation and for a radical understanding of local social systems was at odds with Christianity as a system of human cognition, and the churches as transplants in Africa were too out of step with the African experience to enable people to decide what religious foundations to put in place for constructing a new society in new times. (Sanneh 1996, 134)

Kwame Bediako further elaborates this point when he states that “‘Accepting Jesus as our savior’ always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings” (Bediako 1990, 9). For Christian preaching to connect with people, it needs to address the deepest quests and longings of those people. For Christ to make sense to and be a transformative influence in African culture, there needs to be a serious engagement with that culture. And this is what many expatriate missionaries in West Africa had failed to achieve.

On the other hand, one could argue that the reason why Harris pointed his converts to the Wesleyan Church was that he was not rejecting the mission structures wholesale but rather was using and transforming the mission structures. Perhaps Harris saw in the Wesleyan Church a source of literacy, or of “English” power, or of macro systems of explanation, or a source of gospel truth. Harris was using Wesleyanism for constructing a new society. Wesleyanism represented a way to transcend ethnic differences by embracing a universal vision.

Harris burned fetishes, which had a hold on the people’s religious consciousness. He baptized in a symbolically appropriate way, which connected them with a new identity. He did not wait for people to be fully aware of all the demands of the gospel before accepting them within his ranks. In present day parlance, Harris involved “seekers” in his movement, with the view that as they saw the love of the members and experienced the grace of God in the community, they themselves would become fully committed to Christ.

The synod of the MCG responded to the Harrist movement by sending A. B. Markin and A. B. Dickson, both Akan-Fantes, for pastoral ministry in the Ivory Coast. They were more than a little limited by the fact that they spoke neither the local languages nor French, the colonial language of the country. Bartels reports that the local people actually began to learn Fante so that they could read the Bible in that language as well as make use of the pastoral services offered by those sent by the MCG (Bartels 1965, 176). In 1923, William Platt, the former Methodist missionary leader in Ivory Coast who was now the missionary in charge of the Dahomey district, requested and was granted permission to have direct access to those who had come to the faith through Harris’s ministry. One can only conjecture what would have happened if the MCG had trained its personnel to meet the demands of the Harris harvest and if WW1 had not diverted the attention and resources of people elsewhere. At the very least the Harris movement made it obvious that the standard missionary approach to evangelism was inadequate. The ministry of a second African prophet and evangelist, Samson Oppong, drove this home even more graphically.

### Samson Oppong: From *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*<sup>53</sup>

Most prophets engender controversy, and Samson Oppong was no exception. Analysts still debate his role in the Christianization of Asante, and question whether his activities contributed significantly to the establishment of Methodism in Asante, or whether he was a fraud. None would disagree that his ministry was unconventional. His speech was crude, his knowledge of Christian thought was limited, and he often used threats to convert people to Christianity.

His typical message as reported by Hans W. Debrunner, a leading historian of Christianity in Ghana: “Don’t believe in fetishes. Burn all your magic things. If you do not change your ways God will let fire rain down upon your village” (Debrunner 1965, 6). There is no gainsaying the fact that at least 60,000 people were added to the Methodist rolls as a result of Oppong’s ministry<sup>54</sup> (Debrunner 1965, 6). Samson Oppong’s success can be better appreciated when measured against the background of the relatively fruitless toil and labor of expatriate missionaries.

Debrunner visited Oppong in 1957. At that time, when he was probably more than seventy years of age, Oppong recalled that he had been born into a slave family, attached to the household of a rich Ghanaian named Kofi Dom. Although his family traced its origin from the western part of Upper Volta, modern day Burkina Faso, Oppong identified himself as hailing from the Brong people-group in modern Ghana, the northern neighbors of the Asante. In the course of time, Oppong came under the influence of his uncle, a practitioner and priest of the traditional Akan religion and an accomplished diviner in his own right. Oppong recalled,

When I grew older, I became a healer (*oduruyefo*) and a magician (*osumanni*). In the course of time I gained the following medicines or amulets (*aduru, suman*): 1) *Amanfo*. An amulet that protects whoever wears it from bullets and knives. Anyone wanting to fire at the wearer of such an amulet would find the gun exploding in his hand. The knife of an attacker would break in his hand. 2) *Nsuapem*. When the enemy sees anyone wearing such an amulet he would stand as though rooted to the ground by the magical power. 3) *Wuramumu*. This amulet is shaped like a little pair of bellows. If one uses them and calls the name of one’s enemy, his stomach will distend and he will suffer terrible pain. 4) *Penyan*. This amulet will help one find buyers for one’s goods. 5) *Basaa*. If one throws this amulet into the air it will stay there and everyone will see that one is powerful and not to be trifled with. 6) *Ohye*. If one puts this medicine into the soup of a woman who scorns one’s love, she must die. 7) *Afuto-sapu-gyina-makpe*. A powerful magic [that] will kill twelve enemies at one blow. (Debrunner 1965, 11–13)

This list of amulets gives a panoramic view of the fears and hopes of the Akan-speaking people, including both the Fante and the Asante. Protection from enemies, acquisition and maintenance of wealth, overcoming unrequited love, ability to exhibit

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<sup>53</sup> *Sebewie* means the one who ends life by the power of magic. *Sebetutu* means the one who burns amulets and charms. These are two sobriquets that Samson Oppong acquired in his two opposing professions—first as a traditional magician and then as a Christian prophet and evangelist.

<sup>54</sup> Debrunner says that about 110,000 might have been converted, of which about 50,000 relapsed into their old ways.

power and also inflict harm on opponents—these are all modern fears and hopes as well. As someone who was not only a believer in this worldview but a practitioner and promoter, Oppong's conversion experience became very critical in the success of the MCG in Asante.

Between 1896 and 1901, the British abolished domestic slavery in Ashanti, thereby freeing Oppong to travel to the Ivory Coast to work in a gang that supplied wood for the running of locomotives. He was eventually made the leader of the group, and then he ran away with the group's salaries. He was later imprisoned for the theft and for flirting with a policeman's wife. While in prison he encountered a Fante Christian called Moses who prayerfully commended him to God's keeping, much against Oppong's desires. On the night that the Fante Christian was released, Oppong dreamed of his own release, and heard a voice saying, "I am the God of Moses. Burn your magic things and beat the gong for me [i.e., proclaim my Word]" (Debrunner 1965, 15). The following morning the prison authorities informed him that he was to be released. As a condition for his release, he was to stay for a week at the home of the French district commissioner. Instead, he left after three days and returned to his practice of traditional medicine and magic. His story followed this pattern for some time—periods of imprisonment, dreams of release, eventual release, brief association with Christians, relapse into magical practices, and imprisonment again.

In 1910 the Methodist missionary W. G. Waterworth arrived in Asante to continue what had been a very slow growth of Methodist work. His communicants numbered just over a thousand in all of Asante comprising mostly Fante settlers, traders, and government officials. He admittedly made no inroads into the Asante religious psyche. The reasons are many. For one, the Asante people regarded Christianity as the foreign religion of the victor. (They had been vanquished in wars with the British in 1874, 1896, and 1901.) But as Southon recalls:

One day [in 1920], a tall strongly built Ashanti walked into the mission house. He wore a long, black robe with a red cross on either shoulder and a larger red cross in the centre. In one hand, he carried a bamboo cross and in the other a flat oval stone. There was no need for an introduction. Waterworth knew him immediately from the description given by scores of people. He was Sampson Opong, the Ashanti prophet, who had for several months been preaching a fiery call to repentance in many towns in the heart of the Ashanti forest. (Southon, in Debrunner 1965, 28)

Southon, according to Debrunner, describes the result when Oppong and Waterworth set out on an evangelistic campaign together:

A dozen times a day Sampson Opong gave his message, and the missionary who had become almost heartbroken over the apathy of former audiences, saw the people break down before the Cross in hundreds. . . . Chiefs and people alike turned from idols to serve the living God. Numbers of priests joined the seekers after truth, burning their fetishes and the secret symbols of their trade. Other priests who would not yield to the compelling power of that strange movement had to flee from their towns and hide in secret. In less than two years, more than ten thousand Ashanti had been baptized and hundreds more were on the point of deciding for Christ. (Debrunner 1965, 28–29)

Oppong's ministry had a multi-dimensional impact on Christianity in Asante, in particular in the Methodist community. A large church was built at Adum, Kumasi, to contain the thousands who had come into the church. The Methodist synod decided to locate there its first teachers training college, the Wesley College, the first post-secondary institution of high learning in the country, in 1929. Lastly, Debrunner asserts that the effort opened the doors for Asante men to enter the Methodist ministry (Debrunner 1965, 35). Of course, other socio-political factors also played a role: the opening up of Asante by roads and railways, the hunger for and the opening up of schools, the government's belated understanding policy towards the Asante chiefs and people, and also the realization by the Asante people that the gospel was not the singular preserve of the Fante and other coastal people. While all these factors certainly contributed, it was the ministry of Oppong that made the Asante kingdom part of Christianized Ghana. Thus, Freeman's dream was fulfilled in ways different than he had expected and by means more marvelous than he could have imagined.<sup>55</sup>

These foundational experiences were to mark Ghanaian Methodism in more ways than can be acknowledged. The locational advantages of Cape Coast as a nexus of coastal people and European cultural influences and the residence of an emerging class of African middlemen greatly enhanced the propagation of Wesleyan Christianity. As the focal point of administrative and political power, Cape Coast was a prime distribution center of imported goods and offered a distribution mechanism in the export economies of the western coast of Africa (Henderink and Sterkenburg 1975, 15). The MCG was built on the foundation of indigenous initiative and mass conversions. The instances highlighted here, the Fante Bible band, the missionary career of Thomas Birch Freeman and the *Nananom Mpow* episode, and the conversions and ministries of William Wadé Harris and Samson Oppong, all point to the indigenous factors responsible for the dynamic beginnings and growth of the MCG. The MCG took root in circumstances where the Christian gospel was mediated with an understanding of the spiritual quests and needs of the Akan people. The MCG grew rapidly in areas where the worldview

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<sup>55</sup> My attention has been drawn to similar developments in other mission churches in Ghana, in particular. Paul Jenkins (1974, 23–39) studied four Anglican churches and concluded that three out of the four were initiated and maintained by indigenous leadership. The three churches were a result of Harris's work in the western part of Ghana, through migration of Nigerian Yoruba Anglicans and through local Asante people returning to their hometown after converting to Anglicanism elsewhere. He concluded that in all these cases expatriates tended to exercise rather spasmodic leadership and that the expatriate influence was reduced in direct proportion to distance from the urban centers. Comparing his findings with that of the MCG, he writes, "The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society had considerably fewer missionaries compared with the size of the Methodist Church community in Ghana; indeed, the Methodist Church was often being referred to as an 'African Church' in this period because missionary control was so weak" (p. 30). In conclusion, he writes, "On the whole, therefore, the evidence suggest that missionaries must have played a relatively small role in the leadership of Ghanaian Anglicanism in this period. All rural congregations must have been left mainly to their own devices. Where communication had to be in the vernacular, missionaries would have been able to exercise little influence in detail; even among the English-speaking congregations in towns, there would have been periods with no resident missionaries. Thus, the day-to-day life of the Anglican Church in Ghana between 1905 and 1924 must have depended largely on local leadership; this would have been true to differing extents in differing localities, but nowhere was local leadership unimportant" (p. 31).



undergirding the fears and hopes of the Akan people had been fundamentally confronted and realigned according to gospel priorities.

The church that had been initiated by Fante Christians could only see success when the Western missionaries cooperated with them and saw them as the owners and the primary implementers of the vision. As Dana L. Robert recalls in another African context, “The church becomes an inclusive body when people are considered partners rather than objects: being a mission of the people is significantly different from being a mission to the people. True inclusivity is not a program, but a result of welcoming people into the family”(Robert 1998, 12).

## **THE PROCESS OF CONTEXTUALIZATION**

Here we examine one of the four areas of contemporary Ghanaian Methodism that illustrate how MCG, in the process of adapting to Ghanaian culture, has redefined the Methodism received from Britain. These four areas are worship and liturgy, especially the singing of *ebibindwom*; polygamy and church membership; church union; and, finally, church structure. Initiatives in these areas indicate that MCG has matured into a different self-understanding from that which was inherited from the British. These post-independence efforts at contextualization connected MCG’s mission focus with Akan culture and Ghanaian identity.

### **Primary Means of Self-Theologizing: Worship**

Worship generally precedes a community’s articulation of its theology. Dogmatics and apologetics come later as a reflective rationalization of a set of religious beliefs. A community’s formal theology, therefore, may not be the most authentic or immediate source for inquiry about a church’s self-understanding. It is the church at worship that exhibits what the worshipers believe and hold dear.

In evaluating Christian worship, one needs to allow room for flexibility, since not all will agree on its essential parts. This helpful commentary by J. Christopher Thomas summarizes the situation:

There is always a tension for the Christian between the word which he believes has been revealed to him by God and the assumptions of the society in which this word has to be made intelligible. God’s word, whether it is in the Eucharist or anywhere else must be interpreted in terms of the culture in which it is to be ministered—always assuming that the beliefs adopted from any given culture do not radically alter the content of God’s revelation. It is of course difficult to judge where and when the gospel has been irrevocably changed to something which is not the gospel: and Christians are sure to differ about this as much as they do about the meaning of the Bible itself. (Thomas 1974, 15)

Analyzing the liturgies in some of the mainline churches in Ghana, Thomas showed how the churches had blindly adopted worship styles and practices that were culturally relevant only in the context of their Western origins.

It is widely (though falsely) believed that Ghanaian Christians have wholeheartedly adopted the Christianity of missionaries without any serious contextualization. S. G. Williamson, a missionary of the British Methodist Conference, asserts, “The Christian faith as historically implanted by western missionary enterprise among the Akan has proved unable to sympathize with or relate its message spiritually to Akan spiritual outlook. . . . It has launched a frontal attack on Akan traditional beliefs and practices, and sought to emancipate the Akan from his traditional outlook. [This] had the effect of calling the Akan out of his traditional environment, not of redeeming him within it. The Christian missionary impact constituted a denial of the Akan world view” (Williamson 1965, 175). The Akan educated elite has been critical of the brand of Christianity preached and practiced by the expatriate missionaries, charging that the message of the missionaries failed to connect with the worldview of the Akan.

I contend, on the contrary, that such an assessment underestimates the resiliency of the Akan and their ability to pick and choose, reject and/or combine. The fact is, the Akan, with great ingenuity, have appropriated Christianity and made it their own.<sup>56</sup> If there is one area in which the contextualization of the gospel—or lack of contextualization—is evident, it is in worship forms and content.<sup>57</sup> The Rev. Samuel B. Essamuah, who served a term as MCG president, was a leading figure in assuring the integration of Christian worship with the Akan worldview.<sup>58</sup> The appropriation of

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<sup>56</sup> Kwame Bediako goes so far as to say that Christianity in Africa is the renewal of a non-Western religion (1995, especially, chapters. 4 and 10).

<sup>57</sup> MCG has evidenced a consistent desire to contextualize its liturgy and worship. Consider, for example, the recommendations of an MCG worship committee regarding liturgy. (I summarize here key items included in materials for the 1978 Annual Conference.) Sharing highlights from a meeting of the Ghana Fellowship of the Kingdom, the committee recommended that worship liturgy should deal with 1) fear and insecurity due to sickness, death, darkness, hatred, lorry accidents, lightning, enemies, witchcraft, poisoning, and so forth; 2) distress over the isolation of ethnic group from ethnic group, clan from clan, village from village; 3) anxiety regarding the disintegration of traditional culture, the generation gap, and Western materialism; 4) apprehension over the perceived presence of the dead and dependence upon the ancestors. In addition to the usual services conducted at churches, the memorandum suggested that liturgies for the following occasions be drawn up: Naming/christening of infants, widowhood rites, consecration of a burial ground, dedication of a tombstone, laying of the foundation stone of a private house, traditional festivals (e.g., puberty rites; the deer hunt), and installation of a chief. In the 1970s and early 1980s liturgical reform was seen as especially important in order to make the MCG liturgy more contextual and thereby stem the tide of Methodists joining the newly founded independent churches, where they felt more culturally “at home.”

<sup>58</sup> Samuel B. Essamuah (March 10, 1916–January 27, 1987) was MCG’s fifth president (1979–84). Born into a family of a Methodist catechist, he spent almost half of his active ministerial career in the mission field of the Asante region, serving in Kumasi, Bekwai, and Konongo. He interspersed his career with educational courses in England, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Ghana. An outline for worship, included in the preparatory materials for the 1978 Annual Conference, was typical of his sensitivity to Akan culture. Worship, he wrote, should include the following: 1) **Adoration**: to adore God as the God of our fathers, to acknowledge the universality of God, to recognize him as the Provider, the Guardian against evil, the Reconciler, and the Lord of all human relationships. 2) **Confession**: for resorting to idols and talismans, for resistance to God’s fatherly guidance, for lacking love in personal and family relations, and for thoughts of evil against one’s enemies. 3) **Thanksgiving**: for deliverance from evil spirits, sin, natural disasters, and power of enemies; and for God’s providence. 4) **Intercession**: for the world church, neighboring congregations, non-Christians, for doctors, nurses, and pregnant women. 5) **Petition**: for deliverance from clannishness, infidelity, drought, and so forth. He was a foremost expositor of *ebibindwom*, and over the course of his pastoral career he composed and compiled more than three thousand *ebibindwom* lyrics,

Christianity within the context of Akan culture can be observed particularly in MCG's liturgical innovations, centered on the singing of what is known as *ebibindwom*.

### ***Ebibindwom* as the Definitive Characteristic of Ghanaian Methodists**

It is a well-known fact that singing and dancing play an important role in African life. These two activities mark both joyful and sorrowful times. If the church and the Christian faith are to encompass all of life, then it cannot fail but engage these two activities in its worship and liturgy. In Ghanaian Methodist church life the role of singing and dancing is evident in the emphasis on *ebibindwom* (sacred lyrics). In fact, it can be said that the singing of *ebibindwom* is MCG's most definitive characteristic as a popular movement.<sup>59</sup> The *ebibindwom* is the indigenous musical form that Ghanaian Methodists have bequeathed to the Christian traditions in Ghana (Turkson 1995, 160). Most of them are unwritten. Eighteen pieces of this musical form can be found at the back of the Fante Methodist hymnal, the *Christian Asor Ndwom*.<sup>60</sup>

The *ebibindwom* genre is similar to African-American gospel music in that there is a significant level of audience participation, the repetition of song verses, and constant improvisation during performance in the pattern of its calls and response. Dickson emphasizes that the cantor has not only to be familiar with the biblical passage being preached on but must also be "theologically aware so as to fit that spontaneous music piece in the whole counsel of God. . . . The language is concrete and expresses the thought of a God who cares for the person in all life's situations, both spiritual and physical: he saves not only from sin but also from the dangers of childbirth" (Dickson 1984, 109). Williamson observes, "A competent singer . . . can fasten upon an aspect of Christian truth or experience which is immediately relevant [to the preacher's words], . . . and express and expound this in the recitative with great skill. The congregation,

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spanning the whole gamut of the liturgical calendar. When Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings assumed power as president in the 1980s, Essamuah was the face of valor. At great personal risk, he delivered stirring addresses and timely denunciations of the abuse of human rights.

<sup>59</sup> This was brought home to me afresh on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1999. On this occasion I accompanied other Ghanaian Methodists who had decided to join their compatriots, Ghanaian Presbyterians, at a traditional Ghanaian watchnight service in Worcester, Massachusetts. The Presbyterians offered a warm welcome and introduced us by saying, "Now that the Ghanaian Methodists are here, we expect they can lead us in singing *ebibindwom*." Sometimes, as in this instance, it is when one is placed in a cross-cultural setting that one's identity as perceived by others becomes crystal clear.

Most African societies exhibit through their music a sensibility with which its people relate to life and the world around them (Chernoff 1979, 154). The centrality of *ebibindwom* in MCG's development is reflected by Hoyini Bhila when he writes, "Methodism thrived through its class meetings and local-preacher system, which permitted rapid development of local Ghanaian leadership through the popularity of its singing and in its early provision of schools" (2000). Parsons adds, "The Fante people evangelized by the Methodists have shown a greater interest in the development of the local music and they had a marked influence upon other ethnic groups by the spread of their Christian songs to all churches" (Parsons 1963, 113). Asamoah-Gyadu, a Ghanaian Methodist theologian, refers to the use of the *ebibindwom* among the AICs as a form of oral theologizing (2000, 74).

<sup>60</sup> Appendix K contains several examples of *ebibindwom* that span the liturgical calendar.

apparently with equal facility, joins in the required chorus” (Williamson, 1958, 126; also see Mensah 1960 and Turkson 1995).

Robert Parsons quotes an unidentified church leader as saying, “The preservation and the Christianization of the lyrics has been one of the best things that Methodism has done for our country. This is indeed the silencing of our mouth from profanity and filling it with songs of praise to God”<sup>61</sup> (Parsons 1963, 114).

In 1962 the Rev. Essamuah was asked by the MCG Conference to compile for preservation and promotion all the Ghanaian Methodist *ebibindwom* (Minutes 1963, 150). To this end, over the next several months lyric festivals were held in five of the six districts of MCG—Accra, Cape Coast, Kumasi, Sekondi, and Winneba. A national lyric festival was held on November 11, 1973, at Besease in the Ajumako Circuit.<sup>62</sup> The enthusiastic participation in these events illustrate the fact that the promotion of *ebibindwom* among Ghanaian Methodists, complete with accompaniment of drums and other musical instruments, greatly enhanced the process of the indigenization of Christianity in Ghana.

Mensah states that the use of *ebibindwom* in Christian worship originated during the ministry of Thomas Birch Freeman (Mensah 1960, 183). The importance of *ebibindwom* for nourishing and sustaining piety among members of the MCG rivals Western hymnody, especially among rural congregations. What makes this musical genre missiologically important is its entirely indigenous heritage. It attracts non-Christians to the church’s message in a manner that a straightforward sermon might not be able to accomplish.

The *ebibindwom* musical heritage has been traced to several sources of Akan tradition. One stream is the *Anansesem*, the spider stories. As these Akan folktales are recounted and recited, members of the audience interject interruptions. A listener may stop the narrator to offer an explanation, a commentary, or an approving gesture. The *Anansesem* are important sources of entertainment, moral values, and sometimes religious beliefs. Often reflecting Akan social structure, perhaps even revealing some weakness in a particular authority figure, *Anansesem* are one of the most significant conveyors of the Akan value-system. (The typical practice of spontaneous interruption, offering affirmation to the preacher, helps explain the boldness with which Christian lyricists interrupt sermons with their music.)<sup>63</sup>

The second source for understanding the heritage of the *ebibindwom* among members of the MCG is the songs of the traditional military companies, the *Asafo*, which are used in war, disasters, and emergencies, as well as on joyous occasions such as the enstoolment of chiefs.<sup>64</sup> These are typically songs of invocation, incitement, or exultation as they invoke the ancestral spirits to aid a military campaign.

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<sup>61</sup> The source of Parsons’s statement includes a reference to “cathedral” and to African elements in an installation service. This leads me to speculate that the quotation is from Bishop Peter Sarpong, the Catholic Bishop of Kumasi, one of the foremost advocates of the Africanization of Christianity in Africa.

<sup>62</sup> Between 1962 and 1973, Essamuah carried on his itinerant ministry in five different stations and with two overseas study leaves and appointments. This schedule coupled with the minimal financial support from the denominational office for this music project undoubtedly affected the pace of the work.

<sup>63</sup> This interjection could be interpreted as a means of negotiating the differences between men and women, lay and clergy, illiterate and literate as well as an aversion to ordered liturgy as opposed to spontaneous worship.

<sup>64</sup> Akan chiefs are placed on sacred stools as symbols of state authority. When they take office, the event is

The third tradition underlying the *ebibindwom* heritage is the *adenkum* (calabash) festival music. At Akan traditional festivals, which mark the New Year, rites of passage, harvests, planting, and reaping, and so forth, the people return thanks to the divinities and spirits for success in life. Most people, especially from rural areas, try to return home at least once a year to participate in the rituals, whether they believe in them or not. By rooting the *ebibindwom* in these traditions of Akan culture, Ghanaian Methodists have created a fundamentally new genre from inherited materials. Adolphus R. Turkson recalls that

In about 1940, the Methodist Church in Ghana permitted its congregation to dance in a procession during revival or camp meetings organized to commemorate some historic event such as a centenary of the birth of John Wesley or during the annual celebration of the Church. The dancing was discontinued but it was revived again in about 1980 with renewed spirit. It was to be performed in the nave and in a more reverent manner as expected of the faithful; no form of lewd dancing was to be allowed in the church. In this way, the African dance has been transformed, and its music modified to give it a proper spiritual meaning. (Turkson 1995, 165)

There is an obvious benefit in MCG's use of *ebibindwom* related to the fact that in Africa, as in many societies with low literacy rates, ordinary people internalize the Christian faith not via doctrines and official church statements but via music. Through the medium of *ebibindwom*, many people who would be considered formally illiterate became biblically literate. After people came to know the content of the stories, the refrain provided homiletic exhortation. MCG's use of *ebibindwom* in its outreach and mission mirrored the historic Wesleyan tradition in which Methodism was seen as a singing movement.

What Walter Hollenweger asserts for Pentecostals is equally true of the membership of MCG: "Proclamation took place not in doctrinal statements but in songs, not in theses but in dances, not in definitions but in descriptions. . . . What held believers together was not expressed by a systematic account of faith or creed, but by the fellowship that was experienced, by songs and prayers, by active participation in liturgy and diaconia" (Hollenweger 1996, 4). William Willimon writes, "Some believe the Wesleys reached the common folk . . . more through their music than by any other means. . . . Most of our really important ideas about God [were] sung before they [were] thought [of]" (Willimon 1990, 61).

The *ebibindwom* also provided an outlet for ministry by women long before their role was recognized in official circles. Leadership in *ebibindwom* singing from time immemorial has been the preserve of women: "In the Methodist Church, Ghana, a tradition of lyrical rendering of the gospel stories grew out of the Fante primal worship and became the women's response to preaching. From the start, the majority of the preachers and exhorters were men; so were the few who could read. The women absorbed the stories, committing to memory chapter and verse of what they heard, read, or were told through preaching. This provided the repertoire from which they wove the lyrics they sang" (Oduyoye 1988, 35–53; 1986, 100). It is possible that the relative ease

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known as an enstoolment ceremony; conversely, if they are relieved of their office, they are said to have been destooled.

with which MCG accepted the ordination of women was a result of their singular leadership role in *ebibindwom* singing. In a society with a predominantly oral orientation to life, for women, it was “the songs and cries, their celebrations and tears and the totality of their being [that was brought] to understand that message, to interpret it, to institutionalize it, to celebrate it and weave it into their daily life” (Mbiti 1986, 19–20). *Ebibindwom* therefore, proved instrumental not only in developing and forming the spirituality of MCG, but also in paving the way for the formal acceptance of women as ordained ministers in the MCG.<sup>65</sup>

In the 1980s President Essamuah combined *ebibindwom* with a special healing ministry. According to Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Essamuah “undertook a countrywide, olive oil aided healing tour,” for which he composed the following theme song:

Oduyefo kese, fa wo nsa boto mo do. Besa me yare ma me na menya  
ahoodzen dze asom wo o. Yare nketse nketse rehaw me wo sunsum mu; nsem  
nketse rehaw me wo sunsum mu. Mekyinkyin, ekyinekyin, ekyinkyin, me nnya  
ano edur koraa, Egya, e, besa me yare ma me, na menya ahoodzen na m’asom  
wo o.

*(Great Healer, come and touch me. Heal my ailments that my strength  
may be renewed for your service. Lord, I am deeply troubled, deeply troubled by  
spiritual sicknesses, anxieties and worries. I have been to many places in search  
of healing, but none has been of help. Come, Lord, release me from these  
spiritual ailments and troubles; that I may enjoy the health, strength and vitality  
needed to serve you.)*

In the wake of Essamuah’s tour, many Methodist ministers felt empowered to use olive oil in their faith-healing activities (as some had been doing secretly), knowing that they would not be disciplined or accused of non-Methodist ritual practices (Asamoah-Gyadu 2000, 97–99). Essamuah’s *ebibindwom* composition paved the way for this wider ministry of healing. As confirmed by Robert, healing is a major motif in the mission outreach of African mission churches today (Robert 2003).

As William Willimon says, the church “exists to worship a God, who according to Psalm 150, loves to be listened to, prayed to, sung for, and glorified” (Willimon 1990, 57). Surely, “Religion is a matter of both words and music, and the music is more important than the words. . . . The music of religion is its life of love; and it is the latter which wins men” (McCutchan 1947, 160). Clearly, this medium of gospel communication has stood the test of time, nourishing generations of MCG members in the towns and villages of southern Ghana. From church growth, to cultural transformation, theologizing and healing, MCG’s use of *ebibindwom* has been an effective missiological tool.

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<sup>65</sup> Curiously, *ebibindwom* does not occupy a central place in the theological reflections of Ghanaian Methodists Kwesi Dickson and Mercy Oduyoye, two of Africa’s foremost theologians. In their work, both Dickson and Oduyoye have privileged the written sources against the oral tradition (reflecting their Western academic training). Doing so, they ignored the general experiences of Ghanaian Methodists, especially of rural Methodists, for whom *ebibindwom* may be the only source of liturgical music and biblical instruction.

With a Methodist theology of holistic mission, operating in a West African context and expressed in authentic Akan cultural terms, Ghanaian Methodists have created their own genre of Christian witness.

## Conclusion

By deliberately engaging issues of worship and church polity, MCG entered a process of contextualization that has marked it significantly as a Ghanaian church. MCG's attempts at intentional contextualization utilizing Methodist theology, Ghanaian identity and Akan culture have had a far-reaching impact on Ghanaian Christianity beyond the boundaries of the denomination.

MCG has continued its indigenous ethos by encouraging the use of *ebibindwom* in the worship. By so doing, MCG taps into the visceral aspects of Akan tradition. The active engagement of redefining worship through the improvisatory means of the *ebibindwom* is a vital aspect of self-theologizing. MCG guidelines for church membership tested the limits of inherited theology and traditional practice; yet MCG leadership successfully incorporated polygamists into the church. Perhaps that attempt could have included a fuller treatment of Ghanaian Methodist understanding of Christian marriage, recognizing the fact that the Akan society has a tradition of matrilineal inheritance. MCG is the only mainline church in Ghana that has treated this subject in such detail, and it indicates its boldness in questioning the inherited theology and seeking to refashion it for the future.<sup>66</sup> Even though the attempts at church union would have significantly altered MCG church order, the cordial relations that MCG enjoys with other mainline churches is a result of the long years of church union negotiations. The identity of mainline Christianity was under siege when these discussions were going on, and yet other reasons must be adduced for the failure to achieve in Ghana a united church. Finally, on the question of the episcopacy, MCG has shown its ability to change and adapt to contemporary trends while at the same time responding to the traditional concepts of power and authority. These facets of self-theologizing indicate that MCG as an African institution has come of age. MCG's process of contextualization touched on issues of worship, marriage, identity, and ministry.

## APPENDIX K

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<sup>66</sup> The Anglican Communion has ruled that though monogamy is the preferred goal, members in polygamous marriages would not be excluded from the church.

## Ebibindwom—The Bible in Song<sup>67</sup>

While ebibindwom lyrics span the whole gamut of scripture, the vast majority have to do with Jesus' Passion. The events of the Palm Sunday through Easter account for almost half of the lyrics that I identified in my research. This emphasis agrees with the central theme of Christianity, but it is also the case that there is strong resonance here with the central place that death plays in the life of the typical Ghanaian.

It will be seen in the lyrics presented below that most are the Bible in song and need little interpretation or adaptation. In Ghanaian culture, where storytelling is a significant aspect of the informal educational process, ebibindwom lyrics become for illiterate Methodists the source of Bible knowledge and a means for recalling outstanding sermons on these subjects.

### Palm Sunday

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1.    Hosanna e, Oreba o,<br>Onam Ewuradze dzin mu o,<br>Hosanna e, Oreba o,<br>Onam Ewuradze dzin mu.     | Hosanna, He is coming<br>He comes in the Lord's name<br>Hosanna, He is coming<br>He comes in the Lord's name |
| <i>Nkenkanee</i><br>(a) Ohen Jesus oroko<br>Jerusalem afahye no ase<br>Womfa merenkonson<br>ndzi N'ekyir o | <i>Cantor</i><br>King Jesus goes to the<br>Jerusalem festival<br>Follow Him with<br>palm branches            |
| (b) Osiarfo Jesus oroko<br>Jerusalem Afahye no ase<br>Wombubu ndubaa<br>ndzi N'ekyir                       | Blessed Jesus goes to the<br>Jerusalem festival<br>Follow Him with<br>palm branches                          |
| (c) Agyenkwa Jesus oroko<br>Jerusalem Afahye,  | Savior Jesus goes to the<br>Jerusalem festival   |

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<sup>67</sup> Essamuah 1965.



	Womfa adwontow ndze N'ekyir	Follow Him with praise-songs
	(d) Hen Hen Jesus, Orupue ne Hen nde Womfa mberenkonsun Nhyia No o	Our King Jesus outdoors His kingship today Greet him with palm branches
2	Dede pii yi ase nye den, Emidze metse Kwan nkyen Reseresere adze	Why this commotion? I am a blind man by the wayside, begging
	<i>Nkenkanee</i> Oye nokwar e, Meye ofurafo Tse Kwan nkyen Reseresere adze o.	<i>Cantor</i> It is true I am a blind man by the way side begging

### **Good Friday and Passion Week**

(Amandzehu dapen nye Fida Pa)

#### ***Maundy Thursday***

1	Ma onye ntsem, Fa sekan no hye boha no mu, Peter e	Hasten Put the sword in its sheath Peter
	Ma onye ntsem, Fa sekan no hye boha no mu, Mo nua e	Hasten Put the sword in its sheath My brother (or sister)
	<i>Nkenkanee</i> Mo nuanom, Afei awarehow dodow nye de Aber a wokyee No n' Wohyee ase boboo no asotor Wobinom boboo no mpotsibaa Ho ara naa Peter oyee no awarehow	<i>Cantor</i> My brothers and sisters Sadly When they came for him Some started slapping him Some lashed him with whips Then Peter was saddened and angered
	Ma Otwee sekan wo no boha mu  Twaa ambrado-panyin akowaa n'asowa Ma otoo daadze	He removed the sword from its sheath and slashed the servant's ears off till it fell to the ground

	Ewuradze Jesus kaa kyere Peter de 'Mma nnye dem, Hon a wotwe asekan na Wobowu asekan ano	Lord Jesus said to Peter Do not do that Those who use the sword on others get killed by the sword
2	Bogya dehye mennkeka megu, Bogya dehye menkedzi ho so  <i>Nkenkane</i> Ambrado Pilate oahohor ne nseha o	I will not spill royal blood I will not be responsible for spilling royal blood  <i>Cantor</i> Governor Pilate has washed his hands
3	Bon ben na Oaye na munku No mema hom yi?  <i>Nkenkane</i> M'Egya Nyame Oama akatafo abo esu Ohen nye Nyame Oama eyifo aserew	What sin has He committed That I should crucify Him for you?  <i>Cantor</i> My heavenly Father He cleanses lepers God is King He makes mourners rejoice
4	Wobema me eben, ma minyi Agyenkwa maa hom? Judas ribisa o?  <i>Nkenkane</i> Na iyi na Jewfo mpanyimfo nye No dzii ano Obaa dwetebona eduasa Wotuaa no kaw. Wodze ekitsa ne nsamu Wokaa kyere Judas de Yetua wo kaw, ibesi den ma nsa aaka No?	What would you pay me For betraying the Savior to you? Judas is asking  <i>Cantor</i> Then the Jewish leaders bargained with him and it came to thirty pieces of silver They paid him They have given it to him They then asked Judas We have paid you, how can we get hold of Him?
5	Sua da, onye ko da nnse,  Konyim fir Nyame, Sua da, onye ko da nnse  <i>Nkenkane</i> Iyi na nkyii abanyimbasiaba bi baa bio, Ber yi nna adze rekye koraa	Day of promise is different from day of fulfillment Victory comes from God Day of promise is different from day Of fulfillment  <i>Cantor</i> Then a young man appeared When it was getting to dawn

Ohwee Peter n'enyim dzinn  
 N'asem nye de:  
 'Obarimba yi a ogyina  
 guamu na worotoatoa  
 No yi, eka Noho,  
 Peter kaa ntam de onnyim No  
 Ho ara na akoko bonee  
 Nkyii na enyim retsewtsew koraa  
 Jesus dan N'enyiwa hwee Peter de otse ho,  
 Onye N'enyiwa yee anan

Mewuo, afei naa Peter oaaaa  
 Ebei Peter, Ebei Peter,  
 Sua da, onye ko da nnse.

- 6 Eguambaa Siarfo e,  
 Wo bogyaa agye hen nkwa o

*Nkenkane*  
 Odzebonyeyi nana nye me,  
 Obusuanyi a  
 Adam na Eve nana nye me  
 Owerehonyi a  
 Wo bogyaa no ahor me o

- 7 Hom nsan no  
 Na womfa no mbre Me  
 Wobisa hom a hom nse de  
 Ewuradze wo no ho hia e

*Nkenkane*  
 Aber no Jesus rukopue  
 Ne hen wo Jerusalem no o  
 Osomaa esuafo beenu bi de  
 Hom nko ekuraba a  
 Oda hom enyim no mu  
 Hom bohu asoasaba a  
 Obi ntsenaa do da  
 Hom nsan no mbra  
 Se wobisa hom a,  
 Hom nka de  
 Ewuradze wo no ho hia o

- 8 Egya fakyee hon,

Gazing quietly at Peter's face  
 He said:  
 You are one of those who belong  
 to this man suffering persecution in  
 public  
 Peter vowed that he never knew him  
 Immediately the cock crew  
 Then it was dawn  
 Jesus turned and looked at Peter  
 Jesus had eye-to-eye contact with  
 Peter  
 (Gee), then Peter remembered  
 Oh Peter, Oh Peter  
 Day of promise is different from  
 Day of fulfillment

Blessed Lamb  
 Your blood has saved me

*Cantor*  
 I am a child of sinful people  
 I am a wretched sinner  
 I am a child of Adam and Eve  
 Without any hope  
 Your blood has cleansed me

Untie it  
 And bring it to me  
 When questioned answer that  
 The Lord needs it

*Cantor*  
 When Jesus was inaugurating his  
 kingship in Jerusalem  
 He sent two of his disciples  
 to a nearby village  
 ahead of them  
 "You will find a donkey  
 , which has never been ridden  
 Untie it and bring it to me  
 When questioned  
 You should answer that  
 The Lord needs it

Father forgive them

Wonnyim dza woreye  
Wonnyim dza woreye

For they do not know [understand]  
What they're doing [to me]

*Nkenkane*

Wonnyim dza woreye  
Bon ahye hon ma  
Wonnyim dza woreye  
Enyitan ahye hon ma  
Wonnyim dza woreye  
Akohwi ahye hon ma  
Wonnyim dza woreye  
Ebufuw ahye hon ma

*Cantor*

They don't know what they're doing  
They are full of sin  
They don't know what they're doing  
They are full of envy  
They don't know what they're doing  
They are full of deceit  
They don't know what they're doing  
they are full of anger

### **Eastertide (Wusoer)**

- 1 Onnyi ha, Oasoer o, Kyerewsem reka –  
Woboo no mbeamudua mu,  
Oasoer efi ewufo m'

He is not here, he is risen  
He was crucified  
He is risen from the dead

*Nkenkane*

Mary, Owerehonyi, oye den na  
'rohwehe Tseasefo wo ewufo mu yi?

*Cantor*

Mournful Mary, why do you  
Look for the Living among the dead?

Onyame N'asomfo, woye no den na  
Hom 'rohwehe Gyefo wo ewufo mu yi?

God's worshippers, why do you  
Look for the Savior among the dead?

- 2 Mma mmfa woho nnka Me,  
Medze Moho rekeyere M'Egya

Do not touch Me?  
I am going to see my Father

*Nkenkane*

Nyame a Osomaa Me no,  
Onnhun Me o  
M'Egya a Osomaa Me no  
Medze Moho rekeyere No

*Cantor*

God Who sent me  
Has not seen me  
God Who sent me  
I am going to see Him

### **Whitsuntide (Sunsum Kronkron)**

- 1 Yeregye wo sunsum  
Yedze aye edwuma

We await your Spirit  
To enable us to work

### *Nkenkane*

Noah a opaam hen  
David a odzii ako  
Stephen a ogyee abo  
Paul a okaa asem  
Na wo sunsum  
Na odze no paa  
Na wo sunsum  
Na odze no dzi  
Na wo sunsum  
Na odze no gye  
Na wo sunsum  
Na odze no ka

### *Cantor*

It enabled Noah to build an ark  
It enabled David to fight  
It enabled Stephen to endure stoning.  
It enabled Paul to preach  
It is Your spirit  
Who enabled him to build  
It is Your Spirit  
Who enabled him to fight  
It is your Spirit  
Who enabled him to receive  
It is your Spirit  
Who enabled him to preach

### **Praise (Ntonton nye Ayeyi)**

1 Ewuradzee,  
Agyenkwa,  
Otu apo e  
Ao Agyenkwa, Ao Agyenkwa  
Yegya Wo ekyir a, onnye o

Lord  
Savior  
  
O Savior, O Savior  
If we leave you we perish

### *Nkenkane*

Hen Wura, Onye hen nam  
Enye hen nam a,  
Abonsam nnkotum esi hen enyim

### *Cantor*

Our Lord walks with us  
You Lord walk with us  
The devil cannot stand us

Osian hen ntsi,  
Obeseen mbeamudua no do yi  
Ope hen nkwa,  
Ommpe hen Wu mprenu  
Gye no dzi,  
Obema sunsum abehye hen ma

Because of us  
He hung on the tree  
he desires us to have life  
And not die three times  
Believe/Trust in him  
He'll send his Spirit to fill us

Twe w'afowa, Osabarimba  
Twe w'afowa ma dom yi ngu

Unsheath your sword, great warrior  
Unsheath your sword to defeat this  
opposition

### **Christian Experience, Hope and Endeavor (Christian Bra, Enyidado nye Mbodzenbo)**

1 Menye kronkron rekasa o

I speak with the Holy One

Emi a menye kronkron rekasa  
Adam detse na nso besiaba  
Emi a menye knronkron rekasa o

Even I speak with the Holy One  
I, Adam's dust and yet  
I speak with the Holy One

*Nkenkane*  
Ewuradze Nyankopon  
Kronkron, Kronkron, Kronkron,  
Kronkron hen o! Onyame a  
Oama onnse bi mase bi e

*Cantor*  
Lord God,  
Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy  
O Holy God, O God  
Who has made the insignificant  
significant  
Even I  
I speak with the Holy One  
I speak with the Holy One

Oama Emi dem yi  
Menye Kronkron rekasa o  
Menye kronkron rekasa

### **Parables (Ahyemu Fofor mu Mbe bi)**

1 Dua bi onnsow aba,  
Wontwa nkyen

The tree has no fruit  
Cut it down

Woyee no den  
Na woasow ebun twerede yi?

How come it has  
No fruit

*Nkenkane*  
Jesus kor ase  
Woanya biribi wo do o  
Hen so yebeye den  
Na yeasow aba  
John na Peter, wosoow aba  
Mary na Martha wosoow aba

*Cantor*  
When Jesus went there  
He didn't find any fruit  
What shall we do  
To produce fruit?  
John and Peter – they produced fruit  
Mary and Martha – they produced  
fruit

2 Okuafo no opee  
aba oafona no ho  
Okwan nkyen aba nye yi  
Mfaso biara nnyi ho  
No ndwow no sisi abotan do  
Asaase pa mu aba  
Na mfaso wo ho

The Sower went to sow  
his seed in the land  
Some fell on the wayside  
They brought no profit  
The roots were on rocks  
The seed that fell on good soil  
That was profitable

### **Life Hereafter (Owu Ekyir Nkwa)**

**Se yesom yie a obefa hen aketsena**

**Onyame man mu afeboo**

Onyame man mu afeboo, afeboo,  
Ndaamba yebehya mu o  
Onyame man mu afeboo

*Nkenkane*

Se yetum som a  
Ndaamba yebehya mu  
Onyame man mu afeboo

**If we worship aright,**

**we will be taken to God's land  
to live forever.**

God's land forever and ever  
One day we will meet  
In God's land for ever

*Cantor*

If we worship aright  
One day we will meet  
In God's land for ever

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